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Lebanon's crisis – resolved or deepened?

Harry der Nederlanden

After meeting in Qatar for a week, the main factions in the fighting that broke out in Lebanon on May 8 came to an agreement. The agreement was welcomed as a breakthrough that has avoided civil war and anarchy in the country.

Although the agreement was welcomed by the U.S., France and other Western countries, critics say that it further weakens Lebanon's central government. The agreement gives veto power to Hezbollah, a rogue faction that is as much or more a militia as it is a political party. With the aid of Syria and Iran it has created an army within Lebanon more powerful than the Lebanese army and its own communications network. It has been functioning virtually as a state within a state, especially after it repelled the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in 2006.

The latest eruption of sectarian violence came when the government – predominantly Sunni – ordered the dismissal of a top security official at the airport because he was said to be circumventing regulations to help Hezbollah. The government also moved to shut down Hezbollah's communication network. Despite a UN directive calling for the disarming of Hezbollah, the powerful militia has been allowed to keep its weapons on the grounds that they are needed to defend themselves against Israeli incursions. The understanding, however, was that they would not be used against fellow Lebanese.

That agreement was broken when the heavily-armed, well-organized Shiite organization poured into predominantly Sunni and Druze neighborhoods and, after a brief period of fighting, established control. The militia surrounded the homes of government leaders, seized control of main highways and blocked of the road to the airport. They also shut down the media outlets owned by Sunni leader Saad Hariri, son of the former Prime Minister assassinated in 2005.

Parliament Square in Beirut, Lebanon

During the days of fighting, the Lebanese army stood by and did nothing. Little wonder, for they are no match for the tough, experienced Shiite militia. Moreover, the army is itself composed of people from various sectarian loyalties.

Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's outspoken leader, denounced the government decisions as "treachery". He described the moves at tantamount to a "declaration of war ... on behalf of the U.S. and Israel." The private communication network, he argued, was part of Hezbollah's defense against Israel. Shortly after Nasrallah's speech, Hezbollah militia were overrunning the Sunni neighborhoods of Beirut. The Christians, once a dominant presence in Lebanon, but now a dwindling minority, stayed on the sidelines, divided as they are in the loyalties. One part has aligned itself with the government and another with Hezbollah.

This latest outbreak of animosities is hardly sudden; it is connected to an on-going crisis in governing the country. The government has been pressuring Hezbollah to shed its military function and become part of the political process. But there is pressure on the government to draw up new electoral districts, for under Syria they were redrawn to favor Sunnis and disenfranchise Christians (hence the alliance of a large Christian segment with Hezbollah). Government forces have also been struggling to disarm the numerous small but tenacious militias lodged in 12 Palestinian refugee camps scattered throughout the country.

After the popular uprising in March 2005 that ousted Syrian forces from Lebanon, many expressed hope for a more united Lebanon in the future. And in the Spring of 2005 Hezbollah was indeed part of a unity government. A coalition of Sunni Muslims, right wing Christian parties and Druze (a small Muslim sect) formed the democratically elected government under Sunni Prime Minister Fuad Siniori, but six cabinet seats were awarded to Hezbollah.

The Shiite Hezbollah party expected that its militia would be integrated into the Lebanese army and that its rocket arsenal would thereby receive legitimacy. But under pressure from the West, the Siniora government insisted that the Hezbollah militia could not continue as a state within a state. This provoked a strong reaction from Hezbollah and the six cabinet ministers walked out. In their opposition to the government, the Shiites were joined by the Christian party of Michel Aoun, a disgruntled general, as well as by some small pro-Syrian Sunni and Druze factions, several with militias of their own.

Siniora's government lost a great deal of respect during the war with

See **Lebanon** *on page 3*

Xenophobia bad, Mugabe's retribution worse

HARARE, (IRIN) – Sheila Ndlovu was sweating profusely as she struggled with two bulging bags at the bus station in the Zimbabwean capital, Harare, while trying to get her three young children safely onto the coach bound for Johannesburg, South Africa.

Finally settled, bags stowed and offspring seated, she breathed a sigh of relief. "This is it, I have made up my mind to go and join my husband, who works in South Africa. I have been sitting on the fence all along, then hoping the elections would usher in a new government, but now I have to provide a decent life for our children in South Africa."

Zimbabwe's opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) won the March 29 election, but it took weeks, amid mounting post-voting violence, before the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission finally broke its silence and ordered a second poll for the presidential ballot.

Ndlovu, an accountant, said she had little faith in a democratic solution to the country's political crisis, in which President Robert Mugabe and his supporters castigate the opposition as agents of imperialism who have hoodwinked the Zimbabwean people.

Her husband, who is an engineer, found work two years ago in South Africa's booming construction industry, buoyed by the frenzy of preparing for the 2010 World Cup. She stayed behind to look after the children, but with Zimbabwe's economy disintegrating, squeezed by shortages and an inflation rate that has officially reached 365,000 percent, Ndlovu is now finally ready to join the exodus of professionals.

"It no longer makes sense to go to work in Zimbabwe because the costs of transport, food and accommodation have gone beyond the reach of many," she told IRIN. "I am only too relieved to go to a country without food, water and fuel shortages."

Ndlovu and her husband have joined the more than three million Zimbabweans – at least a quarter of the population – who have left the country to seek a better life. She said many of her friends, who had resisted quitting, had now taken a similar decision; the government's apparent determination to cling to power being the final straw.

She was well aware of the rising

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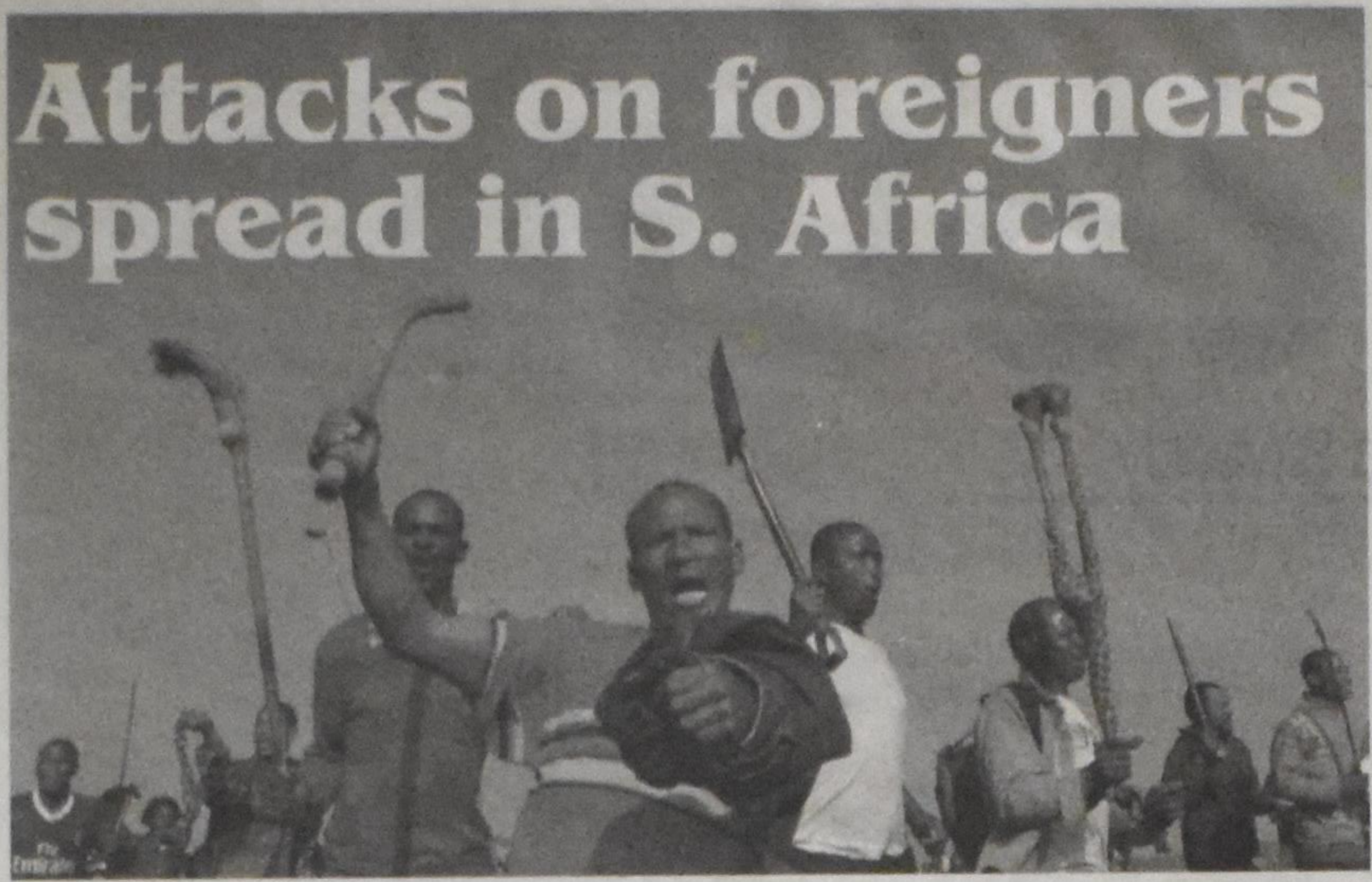
News

Attacks on foreigners spread in S. Africa



African immigrants may soon be forced to fight back against attacks by South African mobs.

Scott Baldauf

Johannesburg, South Africa – South Africa's violence against foreigners took a turn for the worse as beleaguered foreign immigrants organized themselves to fight back.

In the Johannesburg township of Tshepisong, Mozambicans and Zimbabwean immigrants fled from gangs of South African residents, while immigrants in other neighborhoods threatened to resist attacks.

"If it means I have to fight back to protect my wife and children and property, I will," a Zimbabwean immigrant named Madalala Ndlovu told the Pretoria Times. "If the police can't stop these thugs, then I will. I'll kill them if I have to."

With community leaders urging against an escalation of violence, the South African government announced that it would start deploying military fixed-wing aircraft and armed personnel carriers to back up police, as the violence entered its 10th day.

"The organization of foreigners is to be expected, given the police's extreme difficulty in getting the violence under control," says Frans Kronje, deputy chairman of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), a liberal think tank in Johannesburg.

"Foreigners have three options," says Mr. Kronje. "To go back to Zimbabwe, which is not a nicer option than what they already face here. To get into one of the informal camps around police stations, churches, and community centers, which are already estimated to have 13,000 displaced people in the Johannesburg area alone. Or they can organize to defend themselves, which then makes it much more difficult for the police to control."

Violence spreading

With 24 dead, 13,000 homeless, and attacks spreading to the racially mixed coastal city of Durban, South Africa's potent mix of economic hardship and ethnic targeting shows no signs of stopping.

It's a problem that has been a long time coming, with many South Africans blaming their government for failing to deliver on their promises of providing jobs, housing, and better services after the fall of apartheid in 1994, and also failing to ensure that South Africans actually reap the benefits of the current economic boom.

Fleeing foreigners gather in camps

If left unsolved, the current violence could have enormous domestic social consequences for years to come and could damage the country's plans to hold a soccer World Cup – Africa's first – in 2010.

"Everybody is baffled why this is happening now," says Carole Njoki, World Vision's advocacy advisor in Johannesburg. "But locals see foreigners taking their jobs, and they see that the allocation of low-income housing is inequitable. With high inflation and high unemployment, people's patience has reached the breaking point."

South Africa's working-poor population appears to be in downward spiral of economic woe.

High food prices – a global phenomenon – have combined with persistent unemployment – officially estimated at 24 percent, but thought to be as high as 40 percent – to create an angry atmosphere where local South Africans tend to blame the foreigners in their midst.

Foreigners scapegoated for woes

The South African government, intentionally or not, often gives citizens a scapegoat, blaming every-thing from high crime to the stress on state services such as electricity, healthcare, and education on the continued influx of Zimbabweans and Mozambicans.

Many experts say that the government, therefore, shares some of the blame for sparking the current crisis.

"Essentially, [the government's] failures contributed to create a perfect storm of lawlessness, poverty, and unfulfilled expectations, which has now erupted into violence," the SAIRR said in a statement this past weekend. "In failing to maintain the rule of law, the state had conditioned many poor communities to violent behavior."

"The government has made terrible misstatements," says Kronje at the SAIRR. "While there is truth that Zimbabweans do take jobs, the problem is not the Zimbabweans. The problem is that there are not enough jobs for everybody."

In the Johannesburg township of Soweto, police said they now know who the ringleaders of recent violence were and would soon move in to make arrests. Captain Mpande Khoza told the Sowetan newspaper that shops belonging to foreign nationals were specifically targeted, and the prime attraction seemed to be the money, property, and other goods taken.

Mathias – a Malawi native and gardener who would not give his last name for fear of retribution – says he has no idea what sparked the violence against foreigners. But in the current environment, he now trusts no one and says he has only a 25 percent chance of coming out of the current crisis without significant loss of property.

"My building is next to a township," Mathias says. "And when I have a friend over for tea, he looks around the room and sees a TV, a stereo, and he keeps that image in his head. So when a time like this comes along, and the police are doing nothing, he might say, 'Now's the time. Let's take what we can.' "

Scott Baldauf is a staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Mugabe *continued from page 1*

tide of xenophobia in South Africa, underlined by the explosion of murderous violence over the past ten days that has targeted foreigners in Johannesburg, many of them Zimbabwean, but was not deterred.

"The threats of xenophobic attacks pose less danger than the threats of persistent hunger, political violence and shortages of just about everything [in Zimbabwe]," was her wry comment. "As professionals, I am sure we can manoeuvre away from such attacks by living in certain [more upmarket] places. I would obviously not go and live in the townships because we would be sitting ducks."

Scorched earth

Journalist Ivan Musiiwa, traveling on the same bus, is among scores of journalists who have been persecuted by the government for allegedly supporting the MDC. In 2006 he won a scholarship to study journalism at a South African university, but kept postponing taking up his place.

"I want to live in my country, that's why I've been delaying my departure for South Africa. But the situation appears to be getting worse, especially with the escalation of political violence. Journalists are no longer safe. Despite the upsurge in xenophobic attacks in South Africa, I am going to improve my knowledge by doing more studies, while I watch political developments in my country from the sidelines."

Musiiwa is not taking any chances with the welfare of his wife and children. "I have spent a fortune in ensuring that my children and my wife have passports and visas for South Africa. As a journalist I have been around the country since the elections and I've seen for myself the scorched earth policies, in which houses and livestock have been burnt while people have been murdered, tortured," he told IRIN.

"People, especially known or perceived MDC activists and independent journalists, are being abducted and tortured or jailed. I don't want my family to experience that," he said.

Another professional, Sithande-kile Dube, a university graduate and teacher at an upmarket government school, said she had been forced to flee to Harare from Mutoko, in northeastern Zimbabwe, because of the retribution being meted out by ruling party militia and soldiers.

"Teachers, most of whom were election officers, have become targets of political violence after they were accused of 'rigging' elections in favour of the MDC. Scores of teachers have fled from the countryside after they were threatened, attacked or had their homes set on fire."

She told IRIN teachers were abandoning their posts across the country. "In the rural areas, [ruling party] ZANU-PF supporters regard teachers as enemies and suspect them of supporting the MDC. I have found a teaching post in South Africa and I have no hesitation in taking it up." Her husband, a civil servant, is expected to join her soon with their two children.

"It is unfortunate that because of political immaturity in my country I now have to take my skills to a foreign country, South Africa, when I would have wanted my fellow citizens to benefit from my knowledge," Dube added.

The secretary general of the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe, Raymond Majongwe, told IRIN that many schools, especially in countryside, no longer had teachers. "Zimbabwean mathematics and science teachers are in demand in southern Africa and many have fled to South Africa, Botswana, Swaziland and Mozambique."

News

Who is Moqtada al-Sadr?

He is the 'most important and most surprising figure' of the Iraq war.

Michael B. Farrell

Nine-hundred-and-twenty-five people have died in the latest assault in May on militiamen tied to the 34-year-old Iraqi Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. Two-thousand-six-hundred-and-five have been wounded. That's a staggering toll, even amid the Iraq war's devastation. What's more unsettling is that those numbers, according to Baghdad sources, are from just over a month in one part of Iraq: Sadr City.

But the overall toll in the ongoing siege on Sadr's loosely organized Mahdi Army is far greater.

Who is Moqtada al-Sadr?

A firebrand cleric? An anti-American agitator? An Iranian pawn? Those are some of the ways we hear him described in the Western press. Indeed, he has been fiercely against the American occupation since the beginning of the war. But as Patrick Cockburn points out in his timely new book, Muqtada: Muqtada al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle for Iraq, none of these labels explains the pivotal role he is playing in Iraq. (*Note to readers*: The Monitor *uses a different English spelling of Moqtada's name than does Cockburn.)*

"Muqtada al-Sadr is the most important and surprising figure to emerge in Iraq since the US invasion," writes Cockburn, Middle East correspondent for the *Independent* in London who has been covering Iraq since the late 1970s. "He is the Messianic leader of the religious and political movement of the impoverished Shia underclass whose lives were ruined by a quarter of a century of war, repression, and sanctions."

The only way to fathom Sadr's support among Iraqis, says Cockburn, is to understand something about both Shiite history and Sadr's family lineage. To that end, Cockburn takes readers across the Shiite heartland of Iraq and into the religion's holiest places there, Karbala and Najaf. The AD 680 battle at Karbala, in which Imam Hussein died a martyr's death, stands at the center of the Shiite faith.

"The legacy of the grim circumstances in which Shiism was born has had a profound effect on the beliefs and actions of its followers," writes Cockburn. "It is a faith conceived in defeat and subjection," writes Cockburn. He says that "with its emphasis on the endurance of suffering under an oppressive state, [Shiism] was peculiarly well-suited to the psychological needs of a community living under the rule of a leader as cruel as Saddam Hussein."

And in Shiite Iraq, he was indeed brutal. Hussein killed and tortured scores of Shiites, including two of the sect's most prominent leaders: Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr and his cousin Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr, Moqtada's father, known now as the first and second martyrs.

As Cockburn tells it, Baqir was from one "of the great religious families of the Middle East ... part of the clerical aristocracy." He was killed in 1980 along with his sister, Amina Sadr Bint al-Huda.

Years after Baqir's death, Sadiq declared himself the supreme leader of Iraqi Shiites. When he became too threatening to the regime in 1999, he was killed along with two of his sons.

So before Moqtada ever stepped into his leading role, the Sadrist current in Iraqi society was well established, particularly among the nation's poorer Shiites. Sadr's ancestry alone commands respect, and his face is now plastered across southern Iraq on posters along with images of his father and Baqir.

In a sense, Sadr is picking up where his forebears left off. But while the Sadrist movement spread under Hussein, it was the US invasion of Iraq that set in motion a struggle for power that is still being resolved.

After the invasion, Sadr started his Mahdi Army as a grass-roots militia to protect Shiites victimized by Sunni insurgents. But it soon became a means for him to control southern Iraq.

Cockburn goes perhaps further than any Western journalist in explaining what drives Sadr. Yet he admits that the cleric himself remains a mystery. Readers may be left unsatisfied that Cockburn does not probe deeper into Sadr's psyche, but should recognize the great lengths – and great risks – he takes to peel away some of the mystique surrounding one of Iraq's influential leaders. While Cockburn doesn't interview Sadr himself, he talks to his partisans, his fighters, and his rivals.

Incomplete though it may be, Cockburn's book is a must-read for any student of the Iraq war – or for anyone who wants to simply better understand the latest dynamic in the struggle for power there.

Michael B. Farrell is the Christian Science Monitor's *Middle East editor.*

Lebanon *continued from page 1*

Israel in 2006. It was unable to convince its Western supporters to rein in Israel's devastating attacks on Lebanon and appeared weak and ineffectual. Meanwhile, Hezbollah repulsed the Israeli invasion of the south and greatly enhanced it prestige and power.

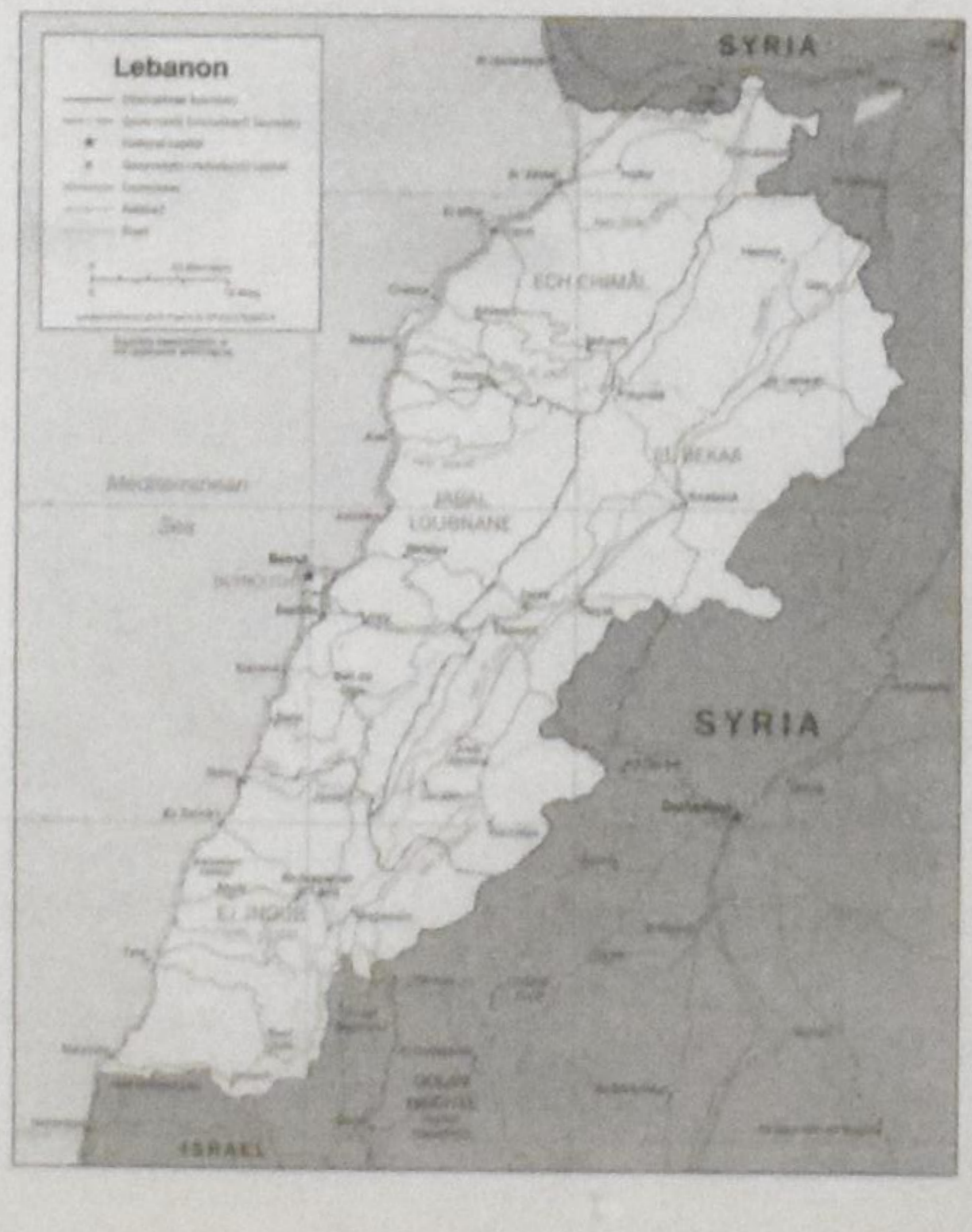
Since the six Hezbollah cabinet members walked out, demanding a stronger presence in the cabinet enabling them to veto any decisions, the government has been locked in a stalemate. The Shia speaker of parliament refused to convene the legislature, claiming that any government without Shia representation would be illegal. And after some 18 months of bickering, the factions had been unable to settle on an agreement about who would be the country's next president.

The latest round of fighting has weakened not only the government but also the influence of the largest Sunni party, the Future Movement. Sunnis were humiliated at the ease with which Hezbollah routed their forces and seized control of their neighborhoods. They blamed Saad Hariri, leader of the Future Movement, that they didn't have the weapons, training and leadership to fight back. As a result, they are turning away from the moderate party to more extreme options. Some Sunnis speculated that the door is now open for Al Qaeda to come in and organize the Sunnis against the Shiites. If the Sunnis become more radicalized and develop their own militia to counter Hezbollah, this hardly augurs well for peace in Lebanon.

Condoleeza Rice and Nasrallah

It may be true that the agreement reached in Qatar was the best that could be achieved under the circumstances, given the weakness of the central government and the aggressiveness of Hezbollah, but it is puzzling that the West should welcome it. Although it is certainly to be preferred to a renewal of the civil war that gripped the country for some fifteen years, it does nothing to unify the country under one government.

The agreement by-passes any consideration of disarming the militias, including Hezbollah and it grants veto power to one ethnic group – the Shiites – over any government business. So what Hezbollah was unable to accomplish by political means, it accomplished by military action.



Condoleeza Rice called the agreement a "positive step" toward resolving the crisis. Yes, the immediate crisis, but it undermines the long-term goal of establishing Lebanon's central government as the sole agent of the use of military force. As long as the militias continue to prosper, Lebanon will always be on the verge of crisis, for every political conflict has the potential of turning into armed conflict and once again bringing chaos down on the country.

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Editorial

This is my body

Arie C. Leder

Scripture's high view of the human body tells us it is nothing less than what God has created for joyful and sensual service. From the day Adam sang of Eve as "flesh of my flesh," they were so gifted and without embarrassment (Gen. 2:23-25; cf. Song of Songs). But then Eve and Adam compromised their bodily service, touching and eating what God had prohibited. In priestly terms, they defiled their bodies, and by so doing defiled the presence of God in which they moved and had their being. Life would forever be changed: the most ordinary bodily activities, birth and work in the field (Gen. 3:16, 17-18), would bear the marks of the broken relationship between God and his human creatures (Gen. 3:10, 23-24), and between men and women (Gen. 3:21, cf. 2:25).

By virtue of their disobedience all Adam and Eve's descendants are broken and impaired, both in body and soul. Thus, Paul teaches that we are dead (Rom. 5:12; 6:23) in our trespasses and sins. "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness," he urges his listeners, "offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness" (Rom. 7: 12-13). It is only within the body of Christ that our bodies, that we as body-soul beings who are fundamentally broken, can begin to experience and practice a righteous use of the body. All of us, whether cognitively or physically impaired. Leviticus already points us in this direction.

Lessons from Leviticus

In its theological description of life in the presence of God Leviticus employs the human body, its ordinary processes, fluids, and a still difficult to define skin disease. Although ordinary, these processes are so "yucky" that chapters 11-15 receive less than their due attention in the pulpit. After all, it might be asked, how can ancient instructions about eating, post-birth uterine discharges, skin disease, and genital discharges be spiritually enlightening? Strangely enough, they are.

The apostle Paul, a learned OT Scripture reader by training, helps us to understand the theology of Leviticus when he reproaches the sexually immoral Corinthian Christians: "Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?" (1 Cor. 6:19; cf. 3:16-17). The human body is endowed for priestly service (Roman. 12:1-2), like the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem and the tabernacle in the desert. In this Paul reflects nothing less than Leviticus. Our bodies are not our worlds to do with or think about as we please, but God's. That is, he rules over our bodies as his temple. Our bodies then are a microcosm of the macrocosm, a small version of the world God created and in which he is present as its Creator, Ruler, and Redeemer.

In the world of Leviticus, God is in Israel's midst and Israel in God's close presence. But God's close presence is dangerous because the sinful descendants of Adam and Eve's need grace to survive in God's close presence (Lev. 10:1-3; Ex. 20:18-19; cf. Heb 12:28-29). Thus Leviticus addresses us as Adam and Eve's descendants: about their, and our, deep brokenness in body and soul; their, and our, lack of wholeness; their, and our, being subject to death and decay like the flowers of the field. Leviticus uses our own bodies to instruct us. For our purposes we will look briefly at Leviticus 13-14, two chapters on skin disease (We'll exclude the part about mildew in the walls.)

The Levitical body and brokenness

Several things we know with a high degree of certainty: the skin disease in question is not Hansen's disease, leprosy, but something like psoriasis. Second, the uncleanness and the resulting excommunication from the camp is not the result of human intentionality. No one wills to have this skin disease. Unlike life-style diseases such as liver problems which result from alcohol abuse or sexually transmitted disease, the skin disorder of Leviticus 13-14 comes upon the person randomly, like most diseases and impairments. Third, the human body is treated like two other important spaces: the camp and the tabernacle. Like these spaces, the human body must be clean, without defilement of any kind. The tabernacle must be clean because it is God's dwelling place, the camp because the tabernacle resides in its midst, and the bodies of Israelites because they reside in the camp, in the close presence of God.

When any one of these spaces becomes unclean, certain rituals are prescribed for its cleansing. Thus, the Day of Atonement rituals serve to cleanse the tabernacle from the defilement of Israel's sin (Lev. 16:16). Human life in the presence of God ought to be pure, whole, clean, and stay within its assigned limits or boundaries, but sin has introduced unwholeness, uncleanness, impurity, and the transgression of limits or boundaries. This is now the "natural" state of humanity before God. Leviticus uses the human body, its natural processes and unintentional defilements, to speak about one's relationship with God.

Because skin disease breaks the skin and may form patches of scales, a person so afflicted carries in her or his body evidence of unwholeness, decay, and death. Because the body is broken and defiled, the person is broken and defiled. The afflicted and unclean must then move from the camp, life continues, but now outside of the normal relationships. Daily, the defiled person experiences a "little exile," i.e., being removed from the place where her true identity is rooted, the presence of God and her family and friends. And there is no fault attributed. Disorder appears randomly. When it so breaks into someone's life the afflicted must warn everyone: "Unclean, unclean." Similar with normal bodily processes such as post-birth uterine and genital discharges. In this case uncleanness occurred repeatedly, or, seemingly, without end (Mark 5:25-34).

Such is the grace of divine pedagogy: Our own bodies, "whole," "normal," or "broken," are conscripted to serve as kingdom-of-God signs that point us to the truth of our "natural" state.

Wholeness and unwholeness

Only through the hearing of the gospel (Rom. 10:14-15) can such pedagogy be effective. Through it alone **we can** confess that we are fundamentally impaired, no matter what our "normal" or "broken" cognitive and physical abilities may be. But that very confession also allows the Christian to bear the whole range of brokennesses – including emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual disease – as signs that participate in God's reminding us of our natural unwholeness. Outside a profound commitment to the gospel this understanding of life in the human body makes no sense; it is foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18-31). It is folly because the world considers our bodies "our only comfort," our very own garden to accept or deny, and then cultivate as we will.

The knowledge of our fundamental impairment shapes us when we experience the random physical impairments that come from disease. We will know that our wholeness does not reside in our bodies, whether "normal" or "broken," but in our being one with the Lord of life during the times of our "normal" or "broken" lives (Mark 5:34). Wholeness derives from belonging to the body of Christ, a body that is perfectly whole from before the foundations of the world, a body whose wounds and suffering comprehends all the wounds, suffering, abuse, cognitive and physical impairment, that may come upon the sinful descendants of Adam and Eve. And when members of that body suffer such impairments in this life they, we, pray for the sick and disabled, the suffering.

But how should we offer such prayer. Take the following samples of prayers for the sick. Note the honesty about our "natural" state. See how the brokenness of body and soul are taken up into a confession of sin, but also of complete trust in the Lord to whom we belong, body and soul, in life and in death. Do we pray this way? Should we pray in this manner? Are these but old-fashioned prayers that do not meet "my needs"? Are our prayers for healing rooted in Christ's wholeness?

Prayer and wholeness

"I acknowledge, Lord, that your chastisement is just; I have deserved them thousand-fold. My sins have so provoked you that you are just in striking me with the rod of your anger. I have also failed to do my neighbor the good I could have while I was strong. Even more, my carelessness has endangered the souls of my neighbor. Therefore you come in righteousness to banish me from the fellowship of my friends and set me among strangers. But Lord and good God, there is grace and mercy with you; and even though this contagion ... prevents me from being with my children, I have complete access to you, through Jesus Christ my Lord." (Excerpt from "A Prayer for one visited by Pestilence," by Willem Teellinck [1579-1629].)

"We beseech Thee that Thou wilt grant us the grace of the Holy Spirit, that He may teach us to know truly our miseries, and to bear patiently thy chastisements, which as far as our merits are concerned might have been ten thousand times more severe.... We submit ourselves without reserve to Thy holy will, regardless whether Thou wouldst leave our souls here in these earthly tabernacles or whether Thou wouldst take them home unto Thyself. We have no fear because we belong to Christ, and therefore shall not perish. We even desire to depart from this weak body in the hope of a blessed resurrection, knowing that then it will be restored to us in a much more glorious form." (Excerpt from a "Prayer for the sick and the spiritually distressed," Psalter Hymnal [1976], 187.)

Continued on next page

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On leadership

Martin D.Geleynse

In earlier days ministers and their wives met together regularly in what we called "InterNos". Peer groups for minsters based on the size of their churches seem to be a more professional replacement of those mainly social gatherings. Rachel Boehm Van Harmelen gives a clear and persuasive description of these peer groups and how they function in her article: "Church leadership: One size does not fit all", *CC*, April 28, 2008. In my day such groups did not exist, and I know only too well the feeling of frustration about being alone in a large church. I hope that this article is read by many members and office bearers in the churches, who may not be aware of this new thing in our churches today.

The article raises a few questions in my mind. First of all I wonder: where is our denominational seminary in all this? Surely it is not the task of the Home Mission Board to get involved in this kind of congregational leadership training. This is properly the task of the seminary. Does the seminary give direction to all these groups, or are they all left to themselves? Do we not need denominational agreement on the direction in which all this is going?

It struck me that the reading list for leaders of large churches does not mention one single Christian Reformed writer. It bothers me very much that in these matters we seek direction only from outside of our denomination. Are we not able to provide direction? Is this all beyond us and much too difficult for ordinary CRC leaders? Please do not misunderstand me in this. I know some of these writers and admire them, but is there no leadership to be found within our own denomination when it comes to this matter of doing ministry in large churches?

Where are the elders in all of this? Ministers are helped, advised, directed to make changes appropriate to the size of their church. Do the elders have any say in this? Do the elders still have the right and the authority to overrule the minister? Does the minister need the approval of the elders, or does he just teach and tell the elders how to make the changes he and his peer group consider necessary for a successful and effective ministry?

In this connection I wonder if classes have anything to do with this development. Or is this all going on completely without the knowledge, awareness and perhaps even involvement of the classes? After all, classes bring regional churches together in mutual accountability. In a classis large churches and small churches, rural churches and urban churches are all the same. So how does this work if we now have these peer groups of ministers of large churches in which directions are given and probably decisions prepared for changes to be brought about in the way ministry is done?

In all this my concern is the Church Order and its function within the churches. In the days when there was no king in Israel every one did what seemed right in his own eyes. The more I read about these new developments the more I become aware of the need for unity in the denomination. The Church Order gave us the basis on which we all accepted accountability to each other for our practice of ministry, whether we serve a large church or a small one. We are now getting ourselves into a situation in which each does his own, because of the need for relevance to modern times, growth, success and effectiveness in ministry.

Those are very dangerous words. They are modern words borrowed from the corporate world. The Church of Jesus Christ, and this includes the Christian Reformed Church of North America, was founded upon and directed by different standards. We need to be obedient to Scripture in everything. It is not the bottom line that should motivate us. The church is not a corporation, even if it is increasingly run according to that model. But it is not! The church is the people of God and the body of Christ! And our Lord Jesus Christ himself placed elders in authority over it.

These elders decided to formulate a Church Order to which all would be held accountable. If this Church Order is no longer valid or workable the synod should do something about it. In the meantime we are all bound to it.

The Bible League of Canada appointments

Henk VandenEnde, Vice President, Development

The Bible League of Canada is pleased to announce that Henk VandenEnde has been appointed as Vice President, Development, reporting to the Executive Director. Henk is a marketing professional with an extensive track record of achievements in sales to a wide range of clientele. His special skills are in establishing strong, long term, interpersonal relationships.

At The Bible League of Canada, Henk will be responsible for donor ministries, public relations and communication, and human resources. "These areas of assignment fit Henk's skills and experience very well," says Dick Kranendonk, Executive Director.

Henk looks forward to meeting many of the existing donor partners of The Bible League of Canada and to acquaint his many friends and associates across Canada with this exciting ministry he has chosen to join. His passion is that many people will become excited about the wide range of ministry programs that are being carried on.

His recent trip to India convinced him that God has a great change in store for that nation. "The Christian Church in Canada has a great opportunity to partner in the phenomenal growth of the Church in that country of over 1.2 billion people," says Henk.

John Postuma, Mission Coordinator

The Bible League of Canada is also pleased to announce that Rev. John Postuma has joined its ministry team as Mission Coordinator, reporting to the Vice President, Development. He has served in the ministry for 36 years, the last seven years in the wider context of advancing the Great Commission to "go to all nations…to preach and teach God's Word" through another mission agency. This will continue to be his focus at The Bible League of Canada. After 19 years of teaching at Hamilton District Christian High School, John's wife Marge will be retiring and joining him in this shared position.

This joint position involves leading ministry tours for passionate donors who are committed to missions and to advancing the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in countries around the world. In addition, they will be organizing tours to bring Bibles into difficult to reach areas of the world. "The purpose of these tours is to allow participants to experience for themselves the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming lives and communities through the power of the Gospel, and thus inspire intensified prayer and support for the work of the Lord," says Dick Kranendonk.

For further information about The Bible League of Canada, consult its website at www.bibleleague.ca

"We acknowledge that we have within ourselves nothing but evil inclinations and inability to do any good. On this account we have merited this affliction, yea, have deserved far more.... Count not our sins against us,... Give us patience and strength to bear it all according to Thy will; and may it thus in Thy wisdom redound to our edification.... Rather chastise us here, Lord, than that we should have to perish with the world hereafter. Grant that we may die to this world and to all earthly things, that we may be renewed daily after the image of Jesus Christ. Suffer us never to be separated from Thy love ...." (Excerpt from a "Prayer for the sick and the spiritually distressed," Psalter Hymnal [1976], 188.)

Or, in the words of the hymn: "Lord Jesus, for this I most humbly entreat; I wait, blessed Lord, at Thy crucified feet; By faith, for my cleansing, I see Thy blood flow; now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." (Psalter Hymnal [1976], number 379, st. 3)

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Perspective

Leadership from behind

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman

Our teachings on Christian leadership need to be vigilantly counter-cultural. In March I wrote an article on "Growing leadership" which garnered reminders in this regard. The first was a reminder that corporate models of leadership are infecting the church – models that are hierarchical and leader-focused rather than church-order focused. I agree that business models can nurture a deistic pragmatism we want to avoid. Our leadership is a not-for-profit spiritually powered strategy of love.

A second comment came with regards to Home Missions' initiative to add two new Board of Trustee positions to people under age 23. This is one example in which those in power can slowly "pass on the reins" to the next generation. Nevertheless, I was reminded of the American "cult of youth and novelty" that often undercuts the contribution of the older (and often wiser) generations. In the Bible, leadership is given to anyone anointed by God, regardless of age, but it certainly does not favour the young as a rule.

This feedback focuses on the need to be counter-cultural. We need to be resisting the influence of "bigger is better" corporatism and the "chronological prejudice" that discriminates against what is not splashingly brand new.

There is one cultural trend, however, which holds promise for the church.

Leadership as facilitation

In terms of leadership models, you might say the postmodern shift has taken us from the "expert" model to the "facilitator" model. The postmodern assumption is that no one *knows it all* – so no one is an expert. Which means, in a way, that everyone is an expert of sorts.

What is theologically accurate about this "facilitator" idea is that it can be seen to dovetail with the confession that every believer is a prophet, priest, and king. It is not first of all grand leaders that bring healthy change, but the Holy Spirit, who prods every heart and gifts every member of the body for service.

So leaders are not a special kind of people. They are all kinds of personalities, body shapes, and abilities. It is passion, gifting and calling that determine leaders, not some pre-determined celebrity character that would fit well on a glossy magazine cover. We have been deceived by the mass media in this regard, which provides us more often with an older "modern" idea of leadership. The leader as hero.

Let me offer one example of the kind of leadership I'm talking about. The example is almost a century old, which tells you the idea may not be as new as some might think. Few people have ever heard of Frank Buchman. One critic said of him: "He has no charisma that I can see. He isn't good-looking, he is no orator, he has never written a book, and he seldom even leads a meeting. Yet statesmen and great intellects come from all over the world to consult him, and a lot of intelligent people have stuck with him, full-time without salary, for forty years, when they could have been making careers for themselves."

Frank Buchman led a global movement that started in the 1920s known as the Oxford Movement. It worked to nurture the lives of great national leaders and stem the tide of Nazism in Europe. But you would never know Frank Buchman, because he worked behind the scenes and put others forward.

Leadership as followership

Here is the key insight about leadership: there is only one true King in this universe, and it is God. King describes his role well, because he is so radically other than what we are. Therefore leadership is a form of *followership*. If we are "kings" at all, it is only as vice-regents that we lead. That is why Buchman spent an hour listening to God every morning. Leadership in the Christian tradition is always a form of servanthood for the great king. It is first of all not about our ego, our self-fulfillment or realizing our potential. It is about equipping, empowering, encouraging others for service.

So leaders, contrary to the direct meaning of the word, may stand behind their people. Leadership guru Max De Pree put it this way: he said "leaders owe people space." That is a great way to describe leadership. I have a friend who loves to see neighbours come together. So he built an inviting new deck on the back of his townhouse. One neighbour peeked over the fence and said: "Hey, can I come over and see that?" Another neighbour came by, saw the barbeque on the deck and said, "We'll come over for a barbeque!" In effect, he made the deck behind the scenes and then neighbours started to come together.

Leaders prepare the ground for others to come together and grow. They do not necessarily have to be dazzling speakers or popular out-going chatterboxes in order to bring people together for change. They have to have a vision for what kind of transformation they want to see, but they need, as De Pree says, to give people space. They need to abandon themselves to the strengths of others.

Sure, there is still need for heroic leaders, the take-charge, lead-the-way kind of visionaries. But let us not passively hand over our initiative to them, for they need good, supportive, critical partners if they are to faithfully succeed. We all know stories of churches, who after a strong leader has left their pulpit, have their members come together with greater energy and enthusiasm because they suddenly feel freed.

We recently had a "leadership" meeting in our church, which included everyone from nursery leaders to Cadet leaders to elders, deacons, and custodial staff. Each of the people in the room has a gift and passion that God has given them. While there are times when leadership is hard and painful, it was great to hear people speak of their vision for their teams and share their dreams for the future. We all stand behind our teams and we stand by each other as a body of Christ: prophets, priests, and sub-kings for the kingdom of God.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.

The unique onion domes of St.Basil's Cathedral in Red Square in Moscow

The Russian Orthodox Scene

Martin E. Marty

Conflicts over religion in American politics and among forces of "the religions" and the threats these pose (e.g. Muslim/Hindu) are so preoccupying, so headline- and primetime-grabbing, that many tense subjects of great import get overlooked. Thanks to Clifford J. Levy's front-page and full-page article in *The New York Times* (April 24), citizens have new reason to reckon with the situation code-named "church-and-state" in President Vladimir V. Putin's Russia, during a time of turmoil, repression, and suppression.

Eastern or Orthodox Christianity has been getting a fair press in the United States in recent years. Some notable evangelicals, seeking to remain evangelical but also desiring to be more anchored in church tradition, have either been converted or have advanced dialogues and conferences which make the Orthodox Church an attractive option. Almost two millennia of "Orthodoxy" behind it, one millennium of Russian Orthodoxy within it, and seventeen years of post-Soviet existence have added to the promise, especially in a time of unsettlement and turmoil world-wide.

Unfortunately, no small measure of that turmoil is being created by the Russian Orthodox and their most prominent member, the Russian President, who in recent years has sounded "born again" – or whatever the Orthodox would call it – and has accompanied his own move with governmental moves, alongside those of Church leadership and against everyone else. As Levy points out, a large Muslim minority has not been singled out for harassment, perhaps because its proselytizing has not made inroads into Orthodoxy. Spiritual and theological ties to Roman Catholicism have been sorely strained since the Iron Curtain tore, as the churches fight over property and prestige. Protestants, however, are getting roughed up and driven into virtual seclusion most of all.

After the Soviet Union imploded, Protestant "sects" – a term the Russians apply to "everyone else" – at first celebrated the opening of Russia and the chance for a Russian Christian spring. Of course, some evangelizers were too aggressive, too competitive, and too ready to give Protestantism a bad name in their thirst for reaping the spoils of Russia that had been ungathered or rendered invisible from 1917-1990. Americans are used to such attempts at conversion – for example, as Pentecostals make inroads in historically Catholic populations, notably the Hispanic. Yet the United States' framework for protecting religious freedom helps keep the peace. Russia does not know anything like it. In most regions its allowance for tolerance or religious freedom appears in name only. (There are local exceptions.) Mr. Putin has encouraged the privileging of one church and the repression if not yet full persecution of the others. And Patriarch Aleksei II, the head of that one church, not only does not help things; he fires them up, his inflammatory rhetoric sounding threatening, almost murderous.

Methodist and Lutheran pastors are besieged and their congregations have had to go into hiding. Protestants find it difficult to get permission to let people know they exist. Ecumenical observers, who had worked to keep channels open with the Soviet-era (and sometimes Soviet-controlled) Russian Church are chagrined that the recently persecuted church is now the repressor, with highest level government aid. The Putin era is not a happy time for "free churches", which all too seldom get the attention they deserve, an attention duly accorded them in Mr. Levy's welcome story about an unwelcome scene.

Martin E. Marty's biography, current projects, upcoming events, publications, and contact information can be found at www.illuminos.com.

Watching the Lunar Eclipse

We are the copper shadow
cast over the moon
in this inky universe.

The print of our planet
masks the round lunar face
flanked
by a million constellations.
The Hunter watches from the south;
Big Dipper looks poised
to flatten this orange orb
from the northeast.

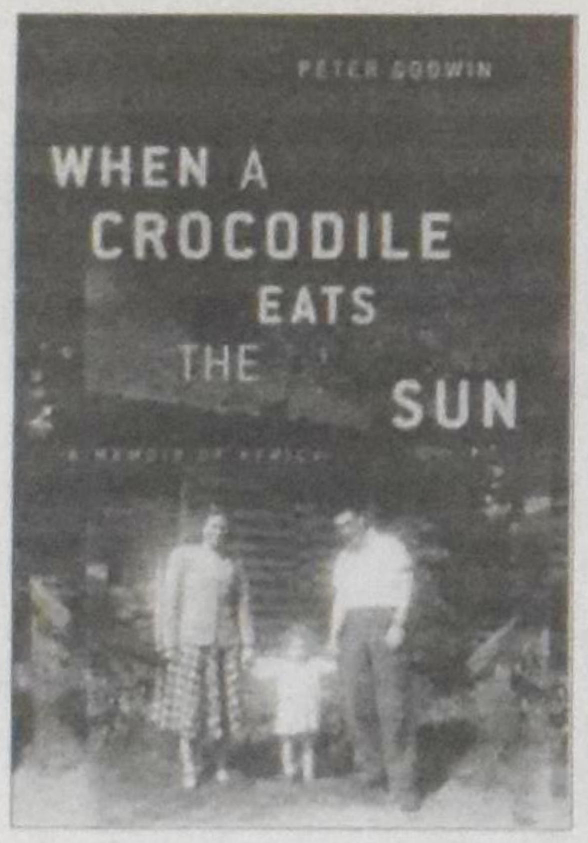
Moon, earth and sun are in alignment..
Pythagoras, Copernicus, Galileo and Newton
students of this geometric precision
discovered heretical glimmers
of planets revolving;
the moon with no light of its own.

Earth and moon continue their designed paths.
A rind of unshadowed moon
begins to reflect the sun again.
Shine moon!
Shine!

Linda Siebenga

An Eclipse of the Sun in Zimbabwe

Linda Siebenga



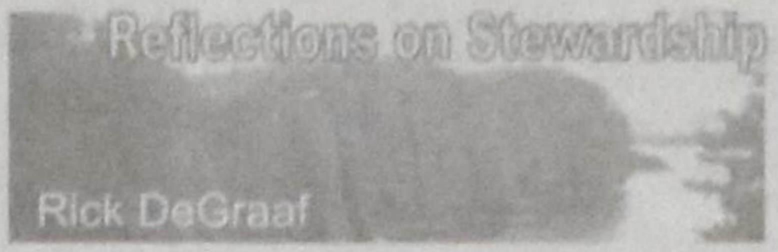
In the far out villages of Zimbabwe they believe that a solar eclipse happens when a crocodile eats the sun.

Journalist Peter Godwin has written a book by that title *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*. Set in Zimbabwe, published in 2006, it is a current account of the changes in that country since the 23 year dictatorship of Robert Mugabe, who the people refer to as the crocodile who has eaten the sun.

Zimbabwe, formerly Rhodesia, was at a point where it grew enough food for the country and for export. It is now in such dire straits that the store shelves are nearly empty after Mugabe's supporters took over the farms, killed the cattle and many of the farmers and brought the country to a state of total chaos.

Godwin writes of return trips to visit his aging parents, his father the same age as Mugabe, almost 80 years old. The story of his father, whose mother and sister died in the Polish extermination camp of Treblinka, is threaded through his life now in Zimbabwe.

It is a very readable, human story of a man caring for his aging parents, from a distance, a story of a beautiful country with great potential, which is hovering under the cloud of the misuse of power – a recurring theme in this little understood continent.



Day 7 — Sabbath

The last in the series: "Seven reflections based on the days of creation":

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested [or ceased, NIV footnote] from his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Gen. 2:2, 3

Somehow I never thought that God would need a rest. I can't picture God needing rest like humans. When we rest, our bodies need the time to recover from the day's work. We get tired, muscles ache, energy levels drop and cells need to be repaired or replaced! But I can't imagine that God needs to do anything like that. No, I don't think that God needs rest in the sense that we need rest, however, God did establish a pattern of rest on this seventh day of creation that is a prescription for contentment for the creatures he made. God provided the seventh day to be a blessing to him and us. It is a pattern of living that brings honour to him as Creator and facilitates an appreciation and contentment in the works of his creation.

It is a daily and a weekly pattern. At the end of each creative day, scripture says that God looked back and then declared that it was good. We take a daily rest at the end of each working day – at least we should. However, on the seventh day God goes further and declares a seventh day to be set aside – to be holy. To be holy also implies sacredness. The seventh day is meant to be totally different from the others. Later in the book of Genesis, we read that when God called Abraham's children out of Egypt God gave specific instructions to his people on how the Sabbath day was to be observed as a holy and sacred day. God declared that *"On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter,..nor the alien within your gates."*(Exodus 20:10b). In God's promise to Abraham and his charge to Israel through Moses he selected Israel to be a model for all the nations around them – to be a nation by whom all other nations would be blessed; through whom all nations would find final and eternal Sabbath rest!

Just imagine what that meant for the people of Israel at that time. They were in the desert between Egypt and the Promised Land. Israel was expected to observe a Sabbath by shutting virtually everything down! That must have been so different for them after slaving in Egypt for so many years from sun-up to sundown, seven days a week, year in and year out!

Have you ever had to work more than a week straight? Maybe you filled in for a colleague who was ill and you took up his shift? If you've ever worked a few weeks straight without a Sunday or other day off, you'll know and understand what you're missing. When it happens to me, I feel so disorientated – I can't figure out what day of the week it is. I also find that my contentment in life and in what I'm doing drops. I feel more like a money making machine and I miss my reflective time – time to relax and think more deeply on what's important and long-term!

God set aside the Sabbath day and set it aside as a holy day. We observe Sundays as a day of celebrating the resurrection of our Lord. It is our Sabbath. In the 10 Commandments, the Sabbath day is clearly set aside as a day for God: "*...the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God...*" Exodus 20:9. It was clearly an act of obedience. Among Israel's neighbours, they must have stuck out! Foreign traders arriving with their caravans of goods soon learned they couldn't trade on the Sabbath. Visitors soon learned that things shut down in Israel on the Sabbath and that they to were expected to observe it if they were staying at an Israeli home.

As a child I remember Sundays as a "don't-do-much" day. It was also a day when Dad was home and he would always have time for us. He would wrestle with us – at least until we got to be too big – while Mom worried about us wrecking the furniture. It was a day when Dad did the dishes with us after supper and Mom was ushered to the living room. In town the streets were empty, stores were closed and trucks were neatly lined up and parked in parking lots. They really were quiet days. Even the non-Christian neighbours knew enough not to mow their lawns!

As people of the New Testament and for a healthier stewardship of our time we do well to set aside a weekly Sabbath in our lives. If Sunday is not possible for you, find another day for rest. When we lived in Dhaka Bangladesh, an Islamic dominated nation, Friday was our Sunday. For us it felt like Sunday too. We went to church in the morning and we enjoyed time together as family and fellowshipped with other Christians. We did not let our work get in the way. In many ways, our 'Sundays' were an oasis for us. Our most pleasant memories in Bangladesh are of 'Sundays'.

Sundays are best observed as a day to worship and connect with God. It is a deliberate day to free time from our work and to spend some time to reflect on what God is doing in our lives. "Sundays" benefit all the other days when we observe them. Having a day to rest and contemplate makes us more ready and able for the workdays – it prepares us for honouring God every day of the week!

Beyond rest, the Sabbath is very much about contentment. It's a contentment that sets aside time to 'smell the roses' – to walk the garden with God. Our time-outs with God help us to be at peace even in the face of terrible circumstances. Sabbath rest facilitates a recharging or strengthening in a manner like land that is renewed by fallowing during a year of jubilee. Fallowing is like fasting for our bodies and helps by flushing out 'ketones' and other stuff – out with the bad to make room for the good! Sundays allow us to flush out our minds!

Sunday is our Sabbath. Jesus promises complete Sabbath for each of us. The work is done – it is finished. Now that is something to be very content about!

Stewardly tip: Protecting Sunday. Families have different rules about Sundays: what we are or are not allowed to do on Sunday? It helps to think in terms of relationship building with God, my family and others. Is what I plan to do just for me? Do I rest just for me? Jesus exercised more freedom on the 'Sabbath' than the religious orders of the day would have liked. We may exercise freedom, but it may presume on someone else's freedom. I personally don't choose to shop on Sunday – respecting not only a Sabbath principle but also because someone else would need to work to offer me that opportunity.

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Managing Caesar

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario.
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Church

The strange travels of four priceless OT manuscripts

JERUSALEM (CBNNews/AllAboutGod) – In 1947, Mohammed al-Dib, a Bedouin shepherd entered a cave at Qumran to see what caused the clinking noise from a stone he threw inside to coax a goat out. Al-Dib found seven scrolls housed in pottery jars.

Al-Dib sold the scrolls to two Bethlehem-based antiquities dealers, who in turn sold three to Hebrew University Archaeology Department head Eliezer Sukenik.

Four other scrolls, among them the Great Isaiah Scroll, were sold to Anastasius Samuel, head (Metropolitan) of the Syrian Greek Orthodox Church in east Jerusalem.

At this time Arab-Jewish hostility was extremely high, and the British were about to leave Palestine. It was expected that all-out war would break out when the British left. So Metropolitan Samuel surreptitiously moved his scrolls out of Jerusalem to Syria. From there they eventually ended up in a New York bank vault, though it took six years.

During this time, no scholars were able to make use of these ancient texts. However, Millar Burrows of Yale University used previous photographs to produce and publish the texts of the Great Isaiah Scroll, the Habakkuk Commentary and the Manual of Discipline. He distributed them in certain parts of the academic world.

Newspaper ad for Bible manuscripts

After several unsuccessful years of quietly trying to find buyers for the scrolls in America Samuel actually ran this ad in the *Wall Street Journal* under "Miscellaneous for Sale" (June 1, 1954: *The "Four Dead Sea Scrolls" Biblical Manuscripts, dating back to at least 200 B.C., are for sale. This would be an ideal gift to an educational or religious institution by an individual or group. Box F 206.)*

Yigael Yadin, son of the great Israeli archaeologist Eleazar Sukenik, happened to be in the U.S. lecturing on the Dead Sea Scrolls, and happened to see the astonishing ad. (Yadin had retired as Chief of Operations in the Jewish underground and had followed in his father's footsteps to become a top archaeologist in his own right.)

Knowing that Samuel would never sell the scrolls to an Israeli Jew, Yadin stealthily began negotiations for the scrolls through intermediaries who did not reveal his identity. He understood the sensitivity of his work, since the Jordanian government was claiming rights to any scrolls found in the Dead Sea area, and they would have jeopardized any legal transfer between the Syrian church and the State of Israel.

The haggling took many weeks, including secret meetings to authenticate the scrolls. The parties finally agreed on a $250,000 purchase price and the scrolls were shipped quietly to Jerusalem.

Yadin had completed his father's work on behalf of their new state. After seven years, all seven scrolls from the original Qumran Cave 1 discovery were back in Israel. All seven of these scrolls were later placed in the Shrine of the Book Museum, a "monument" built on the grounds of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Isaiah Scroll on exhibit for Israel's 60th

JERUSALEM (CBNNews.com) – In honor of Israel's 60th anniversary as a nation, the Israel Museum has put a 2,100-year-old Isaiah scroll on display. The exhibit will continue for the next two months. Of the 220 biblical scrolls known collectively as the Dead Sea Scrolls, this scroll is the only complete one

The scroll being exhibited has traditionally said to have been written by the prophet Isaiah, and orthodox Bible scholars still believe that to be the case. It was removed from public view in 1967 after being displayed for two years. In the 41 years since, the scroll has been stored in a temperature- and humidity-controlled dark room.

Christian Lebanese couple prays for rain to end gunfire, rain comes

Marian Van Til, with files from **Partners International**

BEIRUT, Lebanon – Just over two weeks ago violence again broke out again in Beirut and Hezbollah gunmen took control of large areas of the city. At least 10 people died and 20 others were wounded in this worst outbreak of fighting since the civil war ended in 1990. But one Christian couple who live in the area of the worst fighting tells how God miraculously answered their prayers for protection and a ceasefire:

"A militia man was shooting a machine gun from our stairway. We had hand bombs thrown at the entrance of our door. We had our car that was parked in front of our entrance used as a shield for militia men. Our house had its cornerstones shaken, and our stress was so high that our hearts raced all the time. We prayed this way: 'Lord, you have prevented war from starting twice in the past few months by sending rain. You are so gracious that you do not drown us in a flood as at the time of Noah. Lord, give us a sign. Interfere, Lord. Show that you are not with this war. Show both sides that you are against fighting and killing, against bullets and bombs. Give them a sign.'

'It never rains in May'

"Less than half an hour later, at 2:20 a.m., it started raining. It rained so hard it was coming down sideways, with thunder and wind. It never rains in May in Beirut. The bombs stopped. The shooting stopped. His voice shouted out to the people in the thunder of this storm. The Lord answered our prayers with his thundering voice saying: 'I the Lord your God am not with you. I am not with fighting. I am not with war.'

"His rain poured on the people, washing them from the thought of fighting and war, as he wants to wash his people from their sin with his precious blood of the cross. The Lord blew his wind on the people, silencing their guns and bombs.

"In short, we had so much joy when everything stopped that we were celebrating at first, then fell asleep, exhausted. The whole night we spent it with God. Every time a bomb fell, my wife was in my arms behind the stairway, and we were continuously telling God: 'Lord, we live for you. If we stay alive, it is for us to share your good news with the people. If we die, tonight we will be reclining with you.

"Facing us, on the wall, was a plaque we received as a gift on our wedding day that said, 'For me, to live is Christ, to die is gain.' Around 8:00 that following morning, my brother-in-law came in his car and evacuated us from our house. Now we are safe for the time being."

"Praise God for answered prayer. And please pray with us for God's continued protection over believers in Lebanon and for an end to the violence," requests Brother M. of Partners International, the Christian aid and mission agency to which the Beirut couple told their story.

The vision of Partners International is "to see a hurting world transformed by the power and love of Christ. By advancing a global network of partnerships, we envision thousands of growing, vital communities of Christian witness bringing real hope and real change to the least Christian regions of the world," says the agency.

For 64 years Partners International has "operated from the belief that across the globe there are Christian nationals who have powerful ideas and effective approaches to reach their own people with the gospel. We work to identify such leaders of vision and integrity and partner with them to advance God's kingdom in the least Christian regions of the world."

Indian churches seek 'greening of faith'

SHILLONG, India (ENI) – The National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) has joined the battle to turn "green" by calling for Christians in the world's second most populous nation to join the fight against global warming. NCCI is a national forum of 30 Orthodox and Protestant churches in India.

"We urge all member churches to initiate green parish programs, plastic-free church campuses, biological farming," exhorted the closing message on May 5 from the NCCI assembly during its May 1-5 gathering at Shillong in northeastern India. The assembly meets for a week once every four years.

Take it seriously

"We may not be as much a party to global warming as the developed world. But, we too are contributing our part to it," said Methodist Bishop Taranath S. Sagar, newly elected president of the NCCI. "It's time for the churches in India to take up environmental issues seriously," Sagar continued. "Though the churches stand united at the national level, this unity is not reflected in action at regional or local levels. Our challenge is to foster greater collaboration and unity at local congregation level."

Saying that global warming is "a human sin" against nature, the NCCI said that Christians have a duty "to make our presence a healing and transforming one." Members were urged to promote an effective "greening of faith" at the congregational level, and to encourage and support sustainable farming at a time when agricultural lands are being converted into economic zones due to rapid industrialization.

Debt traps

Regular crop failures due to drought, the excessive use of pesticides and hybrid seeds have driven thousands of farmers into debt traps, triggering suicides and forcing the federal government earlier this year to write off US$15 billion in loans to small and marginal farmers.

Environment concerns and global warming was one of five themes at the church assembly attended by 270 delegates from across India.

China Aid asks prayer for earthquake victims, Chinese Christians

SICHUAN Province, China (ASSIST News Service) – A ministry to the people of China is calling upon the churches of the world to pray for and provide aid for the victims of the earthquake in Sichuan province. China Aid Association (CAA) released a statement saying it "mourns with the suffering Chinese people during this moment of great loss."

Though the Chinese government has said it doesn't need help in clean-up or getting aid to earthquake sufferers, CAA is actively collaborating with the Chinese house churches to send love gifts to help survivors.

Meanwhile, CAA says it has learned that, in spite of the attention garnered by of the rescue efforts for victims of the earthquake, one house-church Bible school in Hebei was raided on behalf of the government and forced to close. CAA says three computer hard disks were taken and the students were dispersed back to their hometowns forcefully. This particular Bible school was established in 2006 by missionaries from South Korea.

'Manifesto' counters stereotypes about evangelical Christians

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (Baptist Press) – Citing stereotypes and widespread confusion about what it means to be "evangelical," a group of Christian leaders in the U.S. has issued a manifesto which defines evangelical "identity and public commitment."

At a Washington, D.C., news conference earlier this month, the group unveiled "An Evangelical Manifesto" and invited other Christians and people of other faiths to engage in dialogue about what it means to follow Christ. Richard Mouw, President of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., was on the nine-member of the steering committee which drew up the manifesto.

Evangelicals' primary identity "by definition is theological, not political, social or cultural," said John Huffman Jr., pastor of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in Newport News, Calif., and also on the steering committee. "Yet we are quite concerned that, because some of the more strident voices in our midst, we are increasingly perceived as people whose primary agenda is political. That simply is not the case."

Broadly, evangelicals are "men and women who endeavor to live our lives under the lordship of Jesus Christ, our Savior, a Christ who is above culture, is not subservient to any culture, and who desires to transform and serve in positive ways those cultures in which his people live," Huffman said.

No specific moral, political agenda

While some voices in society and the media identify evangelical Christianity with a specific moral or political agenda, evangelicals are at heart "Christians who define themselves, their faith and their lives according to the Good News of Jesus Christ," the statement declares. "To be evangelical is to be faithful to the freedom, justice, peace and well-being that are at the heart of the Good News of Jesus."

The declaration asserts a desire of evangelicals to distance themselves from two extreme attitudes toward Christian faith: "Privatized faith" on the one hand, and the "sacred public square" on the other.

The manifesto says that privatized faith "falsely divorces the 'spiritual' from the 'secular' and causes faith to lose its integrity," and "politicized faith," makes Christian beliefs "the weapons of political factions," whether conservative, liberal, moderate or progressive. If the public square becomes "sacred" it gives one religion a preferred place in public life, while the "naked public square," simply bans religious expression from pubic life.

Civil public square promotes justice for all

"We are committed to a civil public square – a vision of public life in which citizens of all faiths are free to enter and engage the public square on the basis of their faith, but within a framework of what is agreed to be just and free for other faiths as well," the statement says. "Every right we assert for ourselves as Christians is a right we defend for all others."

Rejecting both "liberal revisionism" and "conservative fundamentalism," the document calls for evangelical Christians to "part company with reactionaries by being both reforming and innovative" but to also "part company with modern progressives by challenging the ideal of the-newer-the-truer and the-latest-is-greatest and by conserving what is true and good."

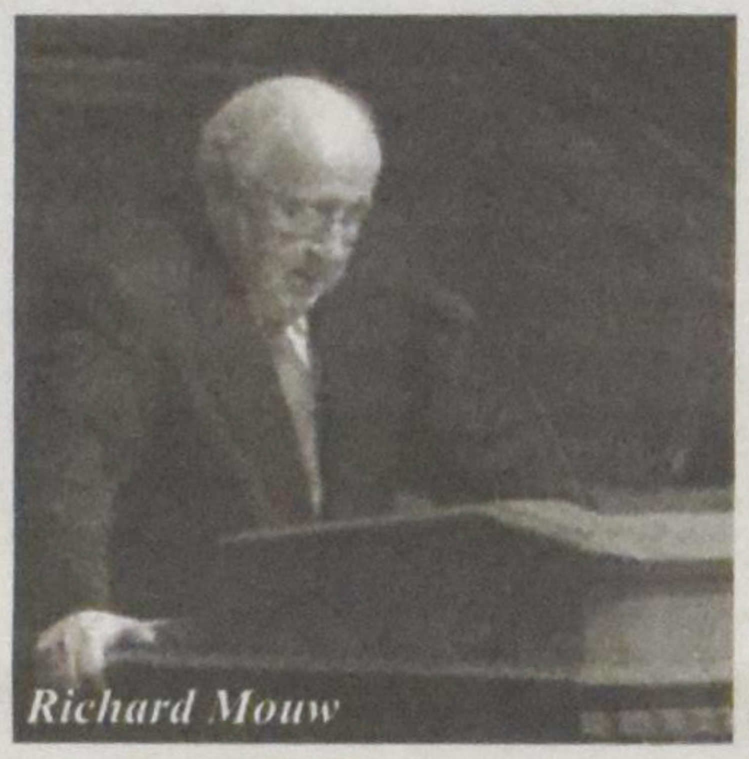
Reformation of own behavior needed

The manifesto also calls for a reformation of behavior among evangelical Christians:

"We confess that we Evangelicals have betrayed our beliefs by our behavior. All too often we have trumpeted the gospel of Jesus, but we have replaced biblical truths with therapeutic techniques, worship with entertainment, discipleship with growth in human potential, church growth with business entrepreneurialism, concern for the church and for the local congregation with expressions of the faith that are churchless and little better than a vapid spirituality, meeting real needs with pandering to felt needs, and mission principles with marketing precepts....

"All too often we have attacked the evils and injustices of others, such as the killing of the unborn, as well as the heresies and apostasies of theological liberals whose views have developed into another gospel, while we have condoned our own sins, turned a blind eye to our own vices, and lived captive to forces such as materialism and consumerism in ways that contradict our faith."

Mouw cites Christ's claims over all of life


Richard Mouw

Evangelical Christianity should be automatically identified in people's minds with a relationship with Jesus Christ out of which flows a life of service to his claims over all of life, not with a specific ideological agenda, Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, said during the news conference.

"Evangelical Christians have had this pattern of either giving up on the culture or we try to take it over," Mouw said. "It is not up to us to win all the victories. It is not given unto us to try and impose our will on a whole society, but rather to witness to the kind of justice, peace and righteousness that is part of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, working alongside people of other faiths and of no faith for the common good."

The document was released with the endorsements of 75 "charter signatories" that included a wide range of evangelical notables in addition to Mouw. The steering committee included David Neff, editor of *Christianity Today* and Os Guinness, writer and social critic. Signatories included Darrell Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary, Kay Arthur of Precept Ministries, John Ortberg of Menlo Park (Calif.) Presbyterian Church, Ron Sider of Evangelicals for Social Action, Rich Stearns of World Vision and Jim Wallis of Sojourners.

The group's website (www.anevangelicalmanifesto.com) offers visitors the opportunity to join an online dialogue about the document, to add their names to the list of signatories and download a guide for further study of the issues involved.

California marriage ruling reveals 'activism run amok': legal expert

Ed Whelan

Carrie Gress

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The recent overturn of the Marriage Defense Act in California is, "simply put, judicial activism run amok," says legal expert Ed Whelan. Whelan is president of the Washington-based Ethics and Public Policy Center. He spoke with the Catholic news service ZENIT about the mid-May 4-3 California Supreme Court ruling that declared the California Defense of Marriage Act (CDMA) unconstitutional.

Some 61 per cent of Californians voted for the Defense of Marriage Act in 2000 to define marriage as the union between a man and a woman. The ruling, Whelan said, "re-defines willy-nilly the most fundamental social institution." If the courts were responsible, Whelan asserted, they would put a stay on the ruling until November when Californians have the opportunity to vote for the California Marriage Protection Act, which would define marriage to the state's constitution as the as a union between a man and woman.

The U.S. President, too, attributed the ruling to judicial activism. "President Bush has always believed marriage is a sacred institution between a man and a woman," said a statement by White House Press Secretary Dana Perino. "It's unfortunate when activist judges continue to seek to redefine marriage by court order, without regard for the will of the people." Perino said that the decision by the California Supreme Court "illustrates that a federal constitutional amendment is the best way for the people to decide what marriage means."

Against children's interests

Bill May, chair of the San Francisco-based Catholics for the Common Good, said of the ruling, "The California Supreme Court turned its back on both the will of the people and the common interest of every child in California in having a married mother and father. By disconnecting marriage from the public interest and overturning the will of the people, the court has undermined the very foundation of society."

May continued by calling on Californians to help reverse the decision by passing the ProtectMarriage.com initiative on the November ballot. "That would put the definition of marriage in the state constitution, putting it out of reach of judges and politicians," he said.

Taking advantage of the new ruling, lesbian comedian Ellen DeGeneres announced during a taping of her TV talk show that she and Portia de Rossi plan to marry, Fox News reported.

Movie spurs bills that would give teachers freedom teaching evolution

LANSING, Mich. (Religion Today) – Ben Stein's movie *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* (see *CC*, April 14), out less than a month, is already apparently having a significant impact in the debate over the teaching of evolution in public schools in the U.S.. Legislatures in three states – Louisiana, Michigan and Missouri – are considering academic freedom bills that would give teachers greater protection and freedom in teaching the strengths and weaknesses of Darwinian evolution.

Passage of any of the bills would be a first for any state. Similar bills in Alabama and Florida died this month, although the ones in the other states, particularly Louisiana, seem to stand a better chance.

"There has definitely been a raising of consciousness among people that there is a problem of censoring scientific information that challenges evolution," said Casey Luskin of The Discovery Institute, a conservative Seattle-based think tank that supports the bills. "I think *Expelled* definitely has played a role. However, this isn't something that is brand-new.... I just think that the message is really getting out right now and consciousness ... is really being raised to the fact that this is a very big problem."

Ascension

He ascended far above all the Heavens

He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe. Eph. 4:10

Abraham Kuyper

Do you believe there is a heaven?

Not the heavens where the stars shine, or the clouds race along,(1) but the heaven of God's glory and the Jerusalem with pearly gates where the angel hosts present themselves at the throne of God?

We mean the spiritual heaven that did not always exist but which, according to Moses' account, came to be in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth.

We are talking of a created heaven, with order and measurements, limits and rules, economy and lifestyle uniquely its own, just as we have these on earth. It has nothing in common with the expanse of the firmament and sky which was created on the second day nor the stars and planets which God called into being on the fourth day.

It is not possible to imagine this heaven, even though it presents some similarities with things on earth. For instance we find similarities in the bodies of the saints which, having been glorified, now belong in that heavenly realm. We find such similarities in the tabernacle shown to Moses on Mount Sinai; they can be seen in the ease with which the angels do their work on earth and also from the images of our earthly life which the Holy Spirit uses to describe things in heaven for us. But this does not take us beyond imagery. It does not truly describe the activities of heaven, the type of movement, nor the way that the community is sustained there. We have only an inkling of how the angels relate to the saints, or both to Christ, and through him with the Triune God. We may have a holy hunch of these things during our earthly pilgrimage, but nothing gives us a clear picture.

This much we know: our existence in that highest, sinless and therefore glorious heaven must never be imagined as similar to our 'resting' on this earth, which might mean 'doing nothing'. Rather, the opposite is true and we must regard our presence on earth as rather dull and uneventful, compared to the rich, exiting and spirited life which soars about the throne of God most High. Judge for yourself. If we can pluck fruit from the same trees twelve times a year [Revelation 22:2] does that impress you as a slumbering ghost-like existence? Does it not reveal a beauty, energy, life and exuberance twelve times beyond what we enjoy on earth?

Heaven is a physical location. This means that somewhere there is a border marking the end of the lower creation and the beginning of the higher heavenly creation. When one crosses the border after death, there will be a moment when everything changes, and one says, "I am no longer on earth. I have entered into an other creation; I am now in heaven."

Even though we make no judgment about its 'distance', since we don't understand it, we must nevertheless establish and confess that heaven is a created realm which is determined by its own boundaries. This also means that we must not speak of God living in heaven if we mean thereby that he does not exist outside of it. "The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you" the Scriptures tell us [1Ki 8:27]. The Lord God is omnipresent, which means God is without limit. Within or outside of his entire creation, we cannot imagine a place where the Lord God is not fully present, always as God Almighty. Even the place of desolation cannot put up boundaries that exclude God's omnipresent holiness.

This does not mean that God reveals himself in the same way in all places. Or that he is visible to all. God is indeed omnipresent whether that be in Abraham or the donkey on

"The Ascension of Christ" by Italian artist Garofalo, 1510.

which he rides. But there is a great difference in revelation. Even among people he reveals himself differently. Just consider the difference in his presence for the man who hung to the left and the one who hung to the right of Jesus on the cross.

In the same way we notice a remarkable difference between the way a rock or cliff reveals God's glory and the way his glory is revealed in the firmament above the earth, or in the fragrance of a bed of flowers. In the same way we should consider the enormous difference between the way in which God, even in his omnipresence, reveals himself here on earth only through shadowy appearances, but in heaven in radiant splendour.

We know that a person has a whole body, and his feet are as much a part of him as his head; yet, when we want to speak to someone, we look him in the eye, because he expresses his soul most clearly through his eyes. In the same way, when our soul seeks the Lord, it naturally looks up to heaven because from that place, we could say, the all-seeing eyes of God rest on us. And in that place the saints will first recognize him, seeing him in his glorious being by looking into those very same eyes.

That is the very heaven to which our Mediator rose, fully alive on Ascension Day.

He had been there before; or rather, even while he walked about on earth, he was, and always remained in heaven as well, as the Son of God. For he is God, co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit; and thus the revelation of his divinity was also the clearest and most glorious in heaven.

In those heavens we find God's throne. In other words, while God is omni-present, there is a place where his self revelation is greatest, close to the angels whom he instructs to carry out his commands. And for all his creatures too, his throne is the centre of his might and glory.

From that centre of might and glory the Son descended to the lower creation. He descended right down to earth, and entered into our sorrow and bitter humiliation.

In all this he remained God, but in his divine mercy our mediator hid his heavenly glory under a modest cloak of a weak and lowly human nature.

Even in this human state he did not change from glory to greater glory, but rather freely offered himself, lowering himself until at last he was completely rejected and fell away to the depth of death itself.

What happened then?

Did the Son of God, by being rejected, let go of his human nature to put an end to his humiliation, and return to what he was before he came to earth?

Absolutely not, dear people of God!

Even when Jesus died, the eternal Son remained united with his human nature, even in the separation of his body and soul. The turning point came only, when he suffered the very depth of his humiliation, and his return to glory began not by casting off his human nature, but rather with a renewal of that human nature after his resurrection.

Yet this was not enough.

His humiliation was a slow gradual progress in which the Son first assumed the form of a servant, then as a servant he entered on a path of suffering and death, and descended into the grave, and finally as a man of sorrows, drank the full measure of the suffering of hell. In the same way there is a slow process of exaltation, progressing from the lesser to the greater, beginning with his exit from the grave in his resurrection, then his triumph over the earth in his ascension, and assuming royal power by sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Finally he will reveal his true glory over all creation when he returns in judgement.

This humiliation and his glorification are at opposite ends of this spectrum.

The manger in Bethlehem was not the low point from which he steadily increased in glory to reach the full measure at his resurrection. Rather up to the point of his resurrection he steadily lost more and more of his glory; it shrank, faded and melted away, so that he could not possibly suffer greater humiliation. From that depth of shame he gradually entered a state of exaltation, not by himself, but by the mighty power of the Triune God to restore him to honour and majesty once more. And so he was restored in the same way that he had gradually descended into his state of humiliation.(2)

The process of exaltation affected the entire existence of the Mediator, not just in his human nature but in his divine nature as well.

I hardly need to mention that it is not as if anything could be added to his divine nature, which always was and remains perfect and complete. Adding to perfection is not possible, and quite unthinkable. However, gold *can* increase in brilliance, not by adding more gold, but by removing the surface dullness, which prevents the real gold from shining through. In the same way Jesus' divine nature gained in radiance, no new aspect was added in the process of his glorification, but the divinity which had remained hidden and internal was once more allowed to shine forth radiantly.

Throughout the time of his humiliation, his divine majesty had been cloaked with a veil, preventing his glory from shining through. However, this was the moment when the veil obtained a transparency which revealed his divine maj-

Ascension

esty, and allowed his divinity to appear in greater glory.

This process of exaltation also touched on his human nature. But, note well, this does not mean that his divine nature only now began to share its traits with the human nature. That is impossible and quite inappropriate. The union of the two natures in one person occurred at the moment of his incarnation, and once the bond was made it was never strengthened or weakened. This very bond assured that the intimate union of the two natures did not lead to an amalgamation of the two natures. His divine nature remained divine and his human nature remained human. Any assumption about the two natures being mingled is out of the question.

Thus the glorification of the Mediator's human nature does not mean something that does not belong, but rather appropriating what is truly human and fitting for human nature. He did not lay aside the outward form of a servant, but did put away the *servant image* of his humanity. In his glorification the Mediator received the most perfect and excellent splendour that could possible be bestowed upon a human being in body and soul. No more, but also no less!

That is his triumph. He was relieved of all that was weak, miserable and vulnerable, all of which he had assumed in his human nature for our sake. Instead he was clothed with all the strength, glory and riches which were given to him for his eternal rule. He had humbled himself as doormat for the wicked, but now, as King of all, he makes his enemies the footstool for his throne.

Our Mediator was exalted as a reward for all his trials.

There was a reward for fulfilling the law in its entirety. A reward also for his mediating work, for which a reward had been promised. "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, ... He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied...." [Isaiah 53: 10,11 KJV]. Finally, he received a reward for the inestimable value of his suffering through which he obtained eternal salvation for all God's elect.

This means that his exaltation must bear the character of the Mediator. In other words, just as he was deeply humiliated not for himself but for our benefit, carrying our debt, so he also ascended from that humiliation, not just for himself, but also for his chosen. In other words, he was richly crowned with all the gifts of glory not only to adorn *him*, but also to adorn *those for whom he died.*

When Jesus arose, all his people rose in him. When Jesus ascended all of God's chosen ascended *in him* to heaven. They too are now placed with Christ in heaven, and at the right hand of God. As the Psalmist sings, "*Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them.*" [Psalm 68:18 KJV].(3) So, obviously, the Mediator could not remain on earth. His glorified condition demanded a place of glory. Those who have been freed must exchange their shackles for honorable clothes, but also must be let out of the prison.

For this reason Jesus, once glorified, could not remain on this inglorious earth. He who was totally exalted from within, also needed a totally glorified environment. Thus he ascended.

From a distinct location on the top of the mount of Olives he ascended into the air, through the clouds and firmament into another creation, another home, which we call heaven. From there he traveled through all the heavens to the highest heaven as the place where God's grandeur is most clearly displayed, the throne of God. There he is honoured in all his glory at the right hand of the Father. He accepted the royal title and began his glorious reign.

All this involves a true relocation, a transition from one place to another. Clearly he is no longer in the place where he once was (Earth), and he has now arrived at the place where he was not earlier (heaven). So, in the highest heaven there is a specific place where Jesus now resides, lives and works in our flesh.

In that place, somewhere in these highest heavens all the angels serve at his command. Here also those who died as saints have found him, and here one day we will look for him when, by grace, we enter that holy place and see him as he is.

For now he is absent from the earth, and will not return until the end of time. Only then will he leave his place of glory, and reveal himself as Judge to all the nations.

In the meantime he is the great Caregiver for all our souls, the Ruler of all Nations, the King of his church, and

Continued on p. 14

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

The hard work of Sabbath rest

At one time Sunday was the longest day of the week in my book. When I was a kid, both my parents had jobs that required working most Sundays. My brother, eight years my senior, was old enough to look after me, but too old to be my friend. Quite often I went to church with the neighbours, more out of boredom than spiritual hunger. I got to dress up in my best clothes, attend Sunday school and be with other people. And we usually didn't get home until nearly lunch time – half the day was gone. Perfect.

One family in our neighbourhood took Sabbath observance very seriously. Their children weren't allowed to play on Sundays. In the summer they sat on the front porch in their church clothes, sipping lemonade and waving dejectedly as we tore past on our bicycles. I confess we drove past as many times as we could. I remember thinking they had it worse than me, even though their parents were home every weekend.

In my teens I started waiting tables at the same restaurant where my mother worked as a cook. Sundays were the busiest days and you could make really good tip money. I was no longer bored, although I felt cheated different times when my friends were heading to the beach just as I began a 12-8 shift on a Sunday afternoon. I vowed to find a job with weekends off when I finished high school.

I guess the church attendance (along with some other significant influences) rubbed off on me, because eventually I became a believer. I looked forward to Sundays as a weekly day of rest and worship. By the time we had children, Sunday was my absolute favourite day of the week. We developed some of our own family traditions, including rising early to enjoy bacon and eggs for breakfast.

Saturday evenings I worked a little later, making sure to have the laundry caught up, the car cleaned and the shoes shined. My squeaky clean kids, smelling of shampoo and baby powder went to bed on time, to ensure no grumpy faces on Sunday mornings.

We always had some homemade treat when we came home from church, and supper was simple, eliminating excessive preparation or clean up.

Jack couldn't ignore the chickens, of course. But he never worked the fields or did more in the barn than what was essential. In the afternoons we played baseball with the kids, or took a walk, or visited friends. Usually there was time for a snooze. We encouraged our kids to get their homework done on Saturdays, so they could fully enjoy a day off.

Our family wasn't unusual. Most folks treated Sunday as a special day, even if they weren't church people. I have precious memories of those years. I hope my children do, too.

These days with fewer shoes to polish around here, and no more kids to bathe, I still wash the car on Saturdays. However, the world around us is different. Even in small towns like Harriston, you can do your groceries on Sunday. Farmers haul tractors and equipment up and down the highway from morning until night, especially in the spring.

There aren't as many transport trucks as on other days of the week, but there are still some on the road. Organized sports cram church time for young families. We're a whole lot "freer" than we used to be on Sundays. I think we've become prisoners of that so-called freedom.

Not that I'm advocating a return to biblical times, when the Pharisees had neatly organized hundreds of laws into thirty-nine distinct categories for keeping the Sabbath pure. Christ made it clear he had no use for such legalistic additions to the law of God. But there's no denying God intended a day of rest every week, considering he followed six days of creation with a day of "sabbat" (literally Hebrew for "stop").

Obviously God takes Sabbath keeping seriously. It's one of the Ten Commandments. Breaking Sabbath by individuals was punishable by death. For the whole nation, how the Sabbath was honored (or not) was a measure of its faithfulness. The penalty for breaching this aspect of the covenant was exile. According to *Eerdman's Bible Dictionary*, "The Sabbath is to be both a sign of and a time for remembering the distinct relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel (Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20: 23-24)."

Should we go back to the last generation's rigid practices and not even allow our children to ride their bikes on Sunday? No. But wouldn't it be beneficial to give some thought as to why God wanted us to have a Sabbath day? In this modern epidemic of busyness, where we scurry and scramble to make life "better," what sense does it make that we no longer have time to nurture our relationship with God, or enjoy the life he has given?

In his excellent book, *The Rest of God,* Mark Buchanan writes, "Sabbath-keeping requires two orientations. One is Godward. The other is timeward. To keep Sabbath well – as both a day and an attitude – we have to think clearly about God and freshly about time. We likely, at some level, need to change our minds about both. Unless we trust God's sovereignty, we won't dare risk Sabbath. And unless we receive time as abundance and gift, not as ration and burden, we'll never develop a capacity to savor Sabbath."

I like that: "Savor Sabbath." Isn't that how it should be? Instead of worrying about the work that won't get done if we take a day off, what a blessing to set the daily grind aside as much as possible and relish a day of worship and rest. It's not about rules and regulations. It's about refreshment and regeneration. To trust God's better judgment and know that he has something wonderful in mind with Sabbath rest is an act of faith. In that way rest *is* worship.

Unions vigorously negotiate time off for their members. As Christians, God hands us no less than 52 days off every year. Think of it – seven and a half weeks! The rest he prescribes isn't the crash-and-burn kind resulting from mental and physical exhaustion, but the deliberate act of remembering who God is and taking time to thank him for it. It's cultivating a heart full of gratitude and praise. It's purposefully bringing glory to our Maker by respecting his design for us – the natural rhythm of work and rest. That kind of rest is actually hard work. But the payoff is enormous. Are you willing to invest?

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History

A French Protestant town's 'conspiracy of good' during the Second World War

Robert Marquand

Chambon-Sur-Lignon, France – The mostly Protestant villagers of this tiny mountain plateau didn't talk about it at the time. Today, they still mostly don't talk about it.

But during World War II, in defiance of the Vichy and Nazi regimes, they hid some 4,000 Jews, many of them children. Ordinary French farmers and shopkeepers risked their lives to rescue Jews from the Holocaust in the largest communal effort of its kind in Europe. What they did has been largely ignored or forgotten in France, experts say.

Yet in Israel, Chambon is one of two European towns honored at Yad Vashem, the official Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. Opposite a stone Protestant church in this French hamlet sits a plaque presented by Jews to "the righteous."

Pierre Sauvage, born here of Jewish parents, says the church and its pastors sparked a highly conscious but silent "conspiracy of good" – to oppose Nazi policies.

At a time when targeting and deporting Jews was considered patriotic, residents of Chambon refused. Instead, they fed, clothed, and housed Jews; sanctioned an industry of false passports and identity papers; and developed an underground railroad to Switzerland.

But the deeply pious faith behind these acts has been lost in the complex politics and denials of postwar France and the shock that settled over Europe as details of the Holocaust emerged over decades.

For years, French students were smothered in myths of heroic war resistance – what British historian Tony Judt calls the nation's "tortured, long denied and serially incomplete memory."

France facing its Nazi collaboration

But in the past decade, France has faced its collaboration with Nazis as never before. In February, President Nicolas Sarkozy ordered fifth graders to adopt and study a Holocaust child victim next year. That proposal, considered pedagogically too harsh, has since been withdrawn.

However, France's education ministry this month is charged with offering alternative curricula for the Holocaust. In this context, Mr. Savauge and historians familiar with the Chambon story say the "rescuers" deserve another look.

For younger French students, the rescuers represent an affirmative story about the Holocaust without sugarcoating the scale of the inhumanity, some educators say.

A group of children who were sheltered in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon

If German political philosopher Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil" was a main insight into Auschwitz, historians say, the rescuers illustrate the possibility of decency and natural goodness in dark times. In a world where man's inhumanity to man has hardly been stamped out, it's argued, such stories are even more relevant.

"Why would we ever want to forget the only people who remembered the Jews during the Nazi plague?" asks historian Patrick Henry, author of the recent work, "We Only Know Men." Mr. Henry's title is taken from the response of Chambon pastor Andre Trocme, who, when asked to identify Jews in the town, told Vichy officials that, "we don't know Jews, we only know men."

Save the popular film "Schindler's List," little attention has been given to Europe's rescuers. Jewish survivors haven't wanted the Holocaust itself reduced in scope. French rescuers were often lumped into the resistance. Yet fighting Nazis often had little to do with saving one's Jewish neighbors.

Tale muffled amid secularism

Perhaps one reason Chambon's response has not been more widely heralded, say those who know it, is that, for France, it has an awkward religious foundation.

In today's aggressively secular France, the tradition here that the Gospels have practical meaning in the face of evil often doesn't sit well. It was not until the 1980s that many Chambonnais shared their deeds – and then only when prodded by outsiders. Just as the central role of devout southern black churches in the US civil rights movement was airbrushed out of history classes – as Pulitzer Prize-winner Taylor Branch chronicles – so, too, France's official secularism, or laïcité, which rules out public discussion of faith, had a similar effect.

"I can't tell you how revolutionary it would be to get this story into French schools," says Sauvage, who was born here in 1944 to Jewish parents who met in Paris, fled south to Marseilles, then found refuge in Chambon. "A sympathetic view of religious people acting well to rescue Jews at that time is not something teachers in France easily gravitate towards."

Rooted in Huguenot tradition

Chambon has unusual roots as a town. Most locals are Huguenot descendents – Protestants driven out of Catholic France in the 17th century. Those not fleeing or sent to hard labor hid in the mountains, living off their wits, and living inside the Bible. They were deeply devout and studied Scriptures daily. They identified with the persecuted children of Israel, developed powerful narratives based on the parable of the Good Samaritan, of sanctuary, of the Pauline teaching that "faith without works is dead," and they retained strong skepticism of worldly authority.

These traditions were quite alive when France agreed in 1940 to rule its southern half under Nazi policies.

"The town gave sanctuary to Spanish civil war refugees, to orphans from nearby coal mining towns, to pacifists from Germany," says Catherine Aubin, a historian in Paris related to the Trocme family of Chambon. "The traditions of the Huguenots were always strong. They didn't try to convert people, they were just devout." The observance of Jewish high holy days took place, albeit in secret.

By 1942, Jews from all over Europe were arriving. They were accepted without question.

Some came for several weeks and slept on floors; others stayed on. "In four years, not a single ... Jew was exposed or denounced. Not one. That's incredible," says Henry.

"What was remarkable about Chambon is that nobody during four or five years asked me the question, are you or are you not Jewish?," notes Joseph Atlas a Jewish refugee who got a math degree here. "I was a young refugee of Polish origin, a foreigner, sheltered by a Protestant community."

Pastors' dissent

In some areas, French authorities went beyond Nazi policies. Jewish adults were to be deported. But French police sent entire families. Vichy propaganda openly described Jews as subhuman connivers bent on destroying the glory of France.

"Protestant pastors were the only ones to confront [Pierre] Laval, [the chief Vichy implementer]," says Fabrice d'Almeida, director of the Institute for Contemporary History in Paris, "to tell him to stop deporting children and mothers. But Laval said, 'It is not my business.'" Some 90,000 French Jews died in Nazi camps.

More than a dozen pastors in the Chambon region were part of the "conspiracy of good," Sauvage describes. Of these, Mr. Trocme and his assistant Edouard Theis were the two most prominent.

'Weapons of the spirit'

Trocme gave a dissenting sermon the day after the Vichy government signed an armistice with Germany: "The duty of Christians is to resist the violence brought on their consciences, through the weapons of the spirit. We will resist whenever our adversaries demand obedience contrary to the orders of the Gospel. We will do so without fear, without pride, and without hate," he said from the pulpit.

Trocme was a pacifist from Belgium who saw first hand the horrors of World War I and "never wanted to relive the ghastly brutality and killing," says Ms. Aubin. He saw the incredible ravages, and said we can't allow this again.... He had a deep scriptural piety and a modern progressive outlook. He said don't fight the Germans, but then said don't collaborate with them."

History

Pastor André and Magda Trocmé

Trocme's sermon turned Nazi theology on its head.

If the Hitler youth handbook argued that "The foundation of the National Socialist outlook on life is the perception of the unlikeness of men," Trocme and Theis rallied Chambon "like a flame to the dry wood of the Huguenot town," says Aubin, to stand up for the equality and dignity of all human beings.

To a degree largely unknown outside France, the war and French anti-Semitism remains a sore point here.

Only when foreign historians, such as Robert Paxton of Columbia University in 1972, began to detail not just the scale, but the enthusiasm with which German policies were carried out, did the nation start facing this history.

Even in 1989 when Sauvage's film on Chambon – "Weapons of the Spirit" – was released, French reaction was mute, as it was when the town entered Yad Vashem: "An entire town is given the rare status of rescuers, a collective honor, virtually unique – but it hardly registers in France," he notes. In 2004 President Chirac visited Chambon and gave a stirring speech. "We are seeing a sea change on the Shoah in France today," he says.

"Maybe more even than the Germans today, we French are still dealing with this," says a high school teacher in Paris. "We still have a wound where our heart is. We all ask the question 'what would I have done?' But it isn't fair to compare all France with the way a rural village treated Jews."

More than 'celebrating diversity'

To be sure, Chambon had natural advantages not found in cities. The area is hilly, rough, spread out. Jews hid in barns and fields, and saw the approach of danger. Some Huguenot hiding places were hundreds of years old. Aubin points out the crucial role dogs played – barking at strangers and allowing escape.

Huguenot locals created a spirit that allowed Catholics, Quakers, Darbyites, and the Red Cross, to join the "conspiracy."

Sauvage hypothesizes that some Germans officials posted there may have been "caught up" in that spirit. Trocme and Theis were arrested at one point, but quickly released; Nazis mostly left the town alone, though records later show they knew it was a center for the false papers Jews needed to move anywhere.

The Chambon example represents both a transcendence and a concreteness that Henry and others say is often lost in many current ideas of good. The rescuers stated plainly, in interviews before they died, that the Biblical injunction to love one another implies that something is owed to one's fellow man, regardless of race or creed.

"The Huguenots were not risking their lives to hide Jews in their barns in order to celebrate diversity," says Henry. "They felt deeply the humanity of the other."

Refugee returns as filmmaker

For Sauvage, making the film about Chambon was a transformative experience. After the war, he moved to Paris with his family, then New York. He wasn't told he was Jewish until age 17. He returned to do a documentary in the 1980s, thinking he would shoot for a few weeks, and quickly put the film out.

Instead, it took five years and much soul searching to complete. Sauvage was simply not prepared, he says, for the character of the Chambon people. It changed his life.

"Every cliché I had imagined about [the people of Chambon] was wrong," Sauvage says. "They were incredibly smart. There was no escaping the fact they were heavily Protestant. They made me ask questions about myself and my own faith, or lack of it. At some point I realized that their selflessness was not depleting but was what gave them strength. This was something new for me.

"They had such a bedrock sense of values that it shook me to the core. I had to ask who I was. My film clearly had to be a Jewish testimony … and I finally realized I had to become Jewish in order to make a film to praise Christians."

Today Chambon is a town of cafes, pizza parlors, stone houses. Tourists come for dappled hills and distant vistas. The air is fresh – a reason Albert Camus came here from Algeria during the war. He wrote "The Plague" in Chambon in 1942 while recuperating from illness.

Even now, Pascal Blanc, a real estate agent here says few locals think their acts heroic.

"It was normal for us to help. We have helped all the time in our past," he says. "This is who we are. We don't think of those we helped raise in the war as outsiders; they are part of our families. Many still visit.

As for the Jewish community in France, leading figures advocate the inclusion of the story of the "righteous" in education curriculum.

"Putting forward these 'pages of light' written by individuals who risked their lives to save the lives of Jewish children is, from our standpoint, very educational," writes Anne-Marie Recolevschi, director general of the Paris-based Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah, in a statement to the Monitor. "The actions of the Righteous constitute a source of hope and enable the transmission of a spirit of responsibility and respect of one another.

Marked for life

Getting Unstuck
Arlene Van Hove

Tattoos now a status symbol. Shelley Fralic, The Vancouver Sun, May 10, 2008
Tattooed: Body art goes mainstream. Tattoos have become a means of expressing oneself and one's faith in a dramatic way. Christian Century, May 15, 2007

Shelley Fralic of *The Vancouver Sun* is a great columnist. She must be a natural born writer by the way she strings words together and how she presents her ideas in fresh and appealing ways. I love her writing and often reread her columns in hope of learning from her. But I do not agree with her headline that tattoos are now a status symbol.

From my perspective, marking one's body for status is the *last* reason people turn to this kind of body art. There are less painful ways to define one's *status* in a society such as ours. Most often the size of people's home, the vehicles they drive and various other possessions they own puts them higher on the status pecking board. Tattoos, on the other hand, have become part of an acceptable cultural landscape.

Body decorations, whatever form such as style of dress, piercings, dyed hair, revealing clothing – have always been a way for men and women to express their own individuality. The easiest, of course, is to follow the art form laid out by the fashion industry. The more unique kind is to mix, match, blend and develop a style of your own. This seems to be happening, of sorts, in the world of tattooing.

The practice of tattooing seems to have its origin in First Nations history. In the twentieth century, however, the practice was used for 'rites of passage.' During both World Wars many soldiers and sailors received tattoos in every harbour they stopped allowing their designs to tell the story of their service.

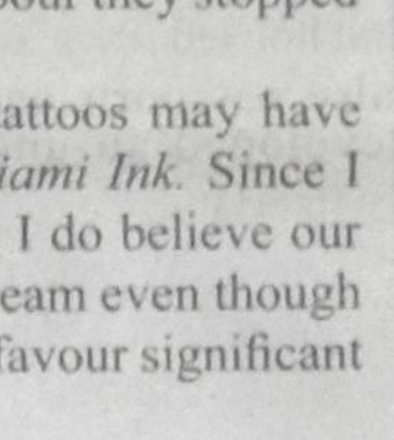
Presently, social theorists believe the growing popularity of tattoos may have come about because of the television shows called *Inked* and *Miami Ink*. Since I have seen neither of them, I cannot comment on them. However, I do believe our celebrity culture has some influence on this practice going mainstream even though they sometimes undergo a process to remove the 'currently out of favour significant other's' name or other related design.

Christians have always rejected the practice of tattooing in response to Leviticus 19:28. The verse seems to be an injunction against pagan rituals. Many Christians now, however, believe the passage to be culturally oriented and not applicable to modern times.

According to tattoo artists most people who come into the shops are purposeful. The design they choose is often about making a statement to themselves as well as to the world. While some do so as a form of rebellion or even as an act of machismo, more often tattoos function in a more substantial way. The artwork becomes something to remember or to commemorate something significant or transformative, (sometimes after experiencing pain and trauma). Other times, the image can serve as a visual timeline charting important events or even marking hidden realities in a visible way.

In our culture, the practice increasingly includes Christians. Many choose crosses, doves, Trinitarian symbols, or verses of scripture often in original Greek or Hebrew as a way of connecting them to the origins of their faith. And since faith is a life long commitment it resonates with Christians that the image will be on their skin for the rest of their lives.

For myself, I developed my own tattoo design after having experienced a painful summer and fall season a few years ago. The disappointment I felt as a result of this experience helped me flesh out how I would try to live my life in a way I could be gracious to others while being strong and free for myself. At the beginning, the journey was often two steps backwards and one step forward. In the last while, it is mostly about moving steadily forward and being content with who I am becoming. Ultimately, life is about extending mutual grace to one another in ways that allows all of us to become who God intends us to be.



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Corinthians

The human, the social and the finality of death and resurrection

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.
I Corinthians 15:21

A. A. van Ruler

Here Paul sets death and resurrection over against each other to compare them. He draws his conclusions about the resurrection from what happens at death by contrasting the two. We might compare this to a mountain climber who scales a fissure by bracing his feet against one side and his back against the other. This is how Paul describes the resurrection in contrast with death.

Paul perceives not just a comparison and a contrast, but also a climax. Sin is washed away by a huge flood of grace. And the resurrection overcomes death. What is true of Adam and death is even more true of Jesus Christ and his resurrection. Death came by a man, but the resurrection, Paul seems to say, especially came by a man.

What does this mean? Above all, I think, it means that Paul intends to let us feel very intensely the human element in death and in the resurrection. Both have a great deal to do with being human. To die is ultimately not something animals do, and rising from the dead is not divine. Both are human.

Death is a human thing. The Bible says that death is punishment for human sin. So only human beings really die, that is, bear death as punishment. Plants and animals really do not die in the sense that the Bible calls tasting death. Death came by a man.

In this way, the Bible preserves our humanity even in death. We must be on our guard against losing this humanity. Death is not a purely natural thing. It retains something of human guilt.

However, this same humanity must be preserved even more in the resurrection. The resurrection, too, came by a man, so the resurrection, too, is human.

It does not make us divine. The source of all our misery is the drive to divinity, that is, the will to be like God. We can never attain that. We are creatures, not gods, and we will always remain creatures.

This is why it is important to draw attention to the fact that the resurrection came by man. It is a form of salvation intended for human beings. It suits us. It is here that we first fully discover ourselves, that is, when we are raised up. To be human means to be raised erect, bodily and spiritually.

Christ and the Woman of Samaria, Among Ruins (1634) by Rembrandt

To be human is to be active, to be busy. And this busyness comes to its highest expression in song. To sing well, we must stand up. So, too, we are raised up to praise by the man Jesus Christ and his resurrection.

This brings us to the second theme. Paul doesn't just point to the human but also to the social in death and in the resurrection.

Death has come by man; Romans 5 says, by one man. From there death spread to all humans. This is the social dimension of death – a solidarity of all in death. We all die in Adam. We die in one another: a parent, for example, dies in the death of a child. We pass death to one another. One person can also die for another. In death we are all equal. These are some of the social aspects of death.

These are even more true of the resurrection. The resurrection too came by man – by one man. Only through the power of his resurrection are we raised from the dead. In our own power there is no resurrection. The power of the resurrection comes entirely from outside of ourselves, from Christ. Only in fellowship with him do we participate in this power. We are engrafted into him and take part in the life of God through him, our Mediator. Here the social dimension is wholly in terms of substitution: he arose from the dead in our place and for our sakes.

I believe there is also a third theme here. There aren't only the human and the social dimensions of death and of the resurrection but also their irrevocability or finality.

Death came by one man and the resurrection came by one man, that is, by means of one man. God himself is the agent. He uses Adam and he uses Jesus Christ to bring death through the one and resurrection through the other. This is why they are irrevocable, final: they are acts and judgments God has carried out on humanity.

By man, by one man, came death. It broke through once and for all times. We cannot undo it. We can no longer hold it back, no more than we can hold back the seas breaking through a dike. We will all drown.

This is even more true of the resurrection. It is an act of God par excellence. Here God's sovereignty comes to full expression. He raised the man Jesus Christ from the dead, and now in the midst of our corruption there is salvation. "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." (Psalm 2:6)

This is grounds for pure joy. How else can we react to this act and judgment than with joy? Their sovereign character transcends our ability to imagine or conceptualize their meaning. We can hardly understand what death is. Even less do we understand what the resurrection is.

God dealt with us through one man: he laid us in the dust of death (Psalm 22). Then he raises us up out of all corruption. He acts for us. We are mere passive objects. The only thing we can do is to continually fall back on God's sovereign and mighty acts by singing his praises. If we fail to do that, we grasp for what is impossible, and our existence becomes empty and futile; we become lost. It is only in him that we are raised up out of our lostness to new life.

Ascension... continued from p. 11

the Comforter of all who have lost heart.

To be sure, he may be restricted to his place in the highest heaven, but still he is omnipresent with his grace, majesty, divinity and spirit. So he knows in precise detail everything that happens on earth, as well as what happens in our own hearts. He stretches out his arms of mercy over our souls, and with his precious wonderful heavenly food he satisfies the hunger of our souls.

He knows the suffering of our hearts; the sins committed in every family; the struggles of every congregation, and the decisions that are made, for or against him, in every church council.

That is exactly why he had to ascend. Now from the highest heaven he can be near all of us, his people, and listen to the pleas and cries of all.

And there is more! Our mediator ascended not only to send us all good gifts, but also to prepare a home for his Bride, his church.

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." [John 14:2] "My Father is always at his work, to this very day, and I, too, am working." [John 5:17]

"It is finished" on Golgotha [see John 19:30] finds it echo in "...it is done" in Revelation [21:6].

1. In Dutch "heaven" and "sky" is the same word [hemel]; the context supplies the meaning. JVM
2. The humiliation continues until Easter morning; it did not end when he died (AK).
3. Kuyper here quotes the Dutch Psalter without giving any reference because people generally had memorized these Psalms in their youth. Below is the English version as it appeared in the CRC Psalter Hymnal of 1976.

The Lord is great, His might untold, His chariots thousand thousand fold,
His armies ne'er confounded.
Among them God with joy displays the glory that in Moses' days Mount Sinai surrounded.
When Thou, O Lord, in glory bright, ascendeth in the heavenly height Our captive bond to sever,
Rich Gifts from those who did rebel Thou didst receive, that men might dwell
With Thee, O Lord, forever.

(# 124, vs 4.) It reflects Psalm 68:17 - 19. The text is in the public domain

Note: *Last issue we published one of the meditations on Pentecost to mark that day on the calendar. Here we return to the order in Kuyper's book, which devotes eight chapters to the Ascension before going on to discuss the meaning of Pentecost in several chapters. Editor*

The Ascension meditations are translated into English by Jack VanMeggelen.

MBUDI ZA NDOKOTORA

This will be the last report from Namibia by Ndokotora Rob for the foreseeable future, as he and his family are returning to Canada in June.

Their adopted daughter Rachel received her passport in May, and the Canadian Immigration Office granted her Canadian citizenship, so she is set to come to Canada with her family.

Rachel Grace Ndapewa Greidanus

The Greidanuses will arrive in Edmonton June 12, and Rob will visit churches not only in the Edmonton area but also in the B.C. Interior and Vancouver.

Editor

Rob Greidanus

Morokeni, ngapi naina (Hello, how are you today)? Ngapi nani ku vatera (How can I help you)? Yinke ono kuvera (What is your illness)? These are familiar Rukwangali phrases that I've used throughout many a day in Rundu. Unbelievably, my time of work in this Northern Namibian Hospital has come to an end this past week. Part of me is celebrating this fact and the other part is grieving.As 'Mbudi za Ndokotora' writings have testified to over the last few years, my time working in the Obstetrics/Gynecology department at Rundu State hospital has not been easy. I have faced trials and opposition, apathy and frustration, death and dying. I could share many stories from these last weeks to shed more light on those difficulties but instead have chosen to focus on a specific series of related tragedies and share some reflections on my time here.

Recently we had 2 maternal deaths on our Obstetrical Ward. It is always very upsetting when a mother dies during childbirth and even more so when it happens twice in less than a week. It is hard to explain how these tragedies happened, but negligence on the ward was a large part of it. I was involved as the doctor on call when the first disaster transpired and am still in disbelief about what occurred on that night. The incident involved a woman in her mid thirties who was HIV positive and was laboring to deliver her 5th child. When she arrived on the Maternity Ward the fetal heart could not be detected and ultrasound done by my colleague confirmed the baby had already died in utero. Although I was on call, my colleague was called in to assess her while I was tied up in the operating room. He made the reasonable decision to allow the mother to attempt vaginal delivery even though the diseased baby was in breech presentation.

After finishing in the operating room that evening I checked on this Mother in labor and she was progressing well and emotionally stable after being informed about her baby's death. I wrote orders in the patient's file to continue with the conservative management and for the midwives to inform me if any complications arose. They seemed content with that decision.

Incredibly, the rest of the night remained quiet on the ward and so I did not hear from the ward over the next 12 hours. However, I was awoken early in the morning by one of the midwives who requested my urgent presence on the ward. She went on to report that this mother was now bleeding profusely and having difficulty breathing. I rushed in as quickly as I could, only to discover I was too late. I found the mother lying in a large pool of blood on the delivery bed with no signs of life. Now began the painful process of investigating the cause of her untimely death. I soon found out that the baby was only delivered about 30 minutes before they called me that morning. Further enquiries revealed that she actually delivered most of the baby's body 10 hours earlier but then the head got stuck in the birth canal. The midwife on duty felt that this was no big deal since the baby was already dead and therefore I was never called. Based on this, the nurses decided to allow this mother to try and push this obstructed baby out for the entire night.

When the baby was finally delivered early that morning, the mother was exhausted and so was her womb. As a result, the uterus would not contract and she developed a massive post partum hemorrhage. To make matters worse, they did not have an intravenous line in place and could not establish venous access once she went into hypovolemic shock. They also failed to administer oxytocin or ergometrine to make the uterus contract and the bleeding stop (both drugs we have in stock on the ward for emergencies such as these). Most critically, they failed to call me when the labor was prolonged and even when the bleeding became profound. Instead, they waited to call me until she was taking her last breaths.

I now regret that I never went in on my own initiative to check on her progress as it could have saved that mother's life. My words for the nurses were few at the time, but the disappointment and frustration were written all over my face. As I certified her death and documented the history in the medical file, I discovered that no nurse's notes were written all night; on a shift that was exceptionally quiet. There really was no explanation for this neglect. Tragically, as a result, this lady is now survived by 4 young children.

The very next week, another mother died on the ward shortly after childbirth. She was under the care of one of my colleagues, but the story was not so different. She also died of post partum hemorrhage that was diagnosed and treated too late. These 2 cases in less than a week led to an official inquiry at the hospital. I encouraged the medical director to conduct this official investigation and was praying for justice. I was not out to chastise my nursing colleagues, but entered the meeting hopeful that at least a dialogue would take place and that they would learn from these mistakes. Instead, what I found in that meeting was denial and deception. Sadly, there seemed to be no acknowledgement of wrong done, or a desire to make changes in obstetrical management. No disciplinary action was taken by the review panel and things pretty much carried on as usual.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the panel did suggest some further mandatory training for the nurses on management of postpartum hemorrhage and so I volunteered to lead a workshop for the nurses on emergency management of this deadly complication. The nurse-midwives seemed keen on having the training and so I let them pick the date and time to fit their schedule and maximize attendance. I spent many days preparing for the workshop, but sadly, when the day came, only a handful of nurses actually showed up.

As fate would have it, the day after my poorly attended workshop, I was on call again and another postpartum hemorrhage occurred on the ward. This time I was at least called to the ward to assist the midwives before it ended in tragedy. However, when I arrived on the ward I found them standing around watching her bleed rather than taking emergency action. I tried to remain calm and focused my energies on saving the mother's life. Thankfully, after expelling a large clot from the uterus, massaging the womb, establishing an IV line, and giving some emergency medicines and resuscitation fluids, the bleeding stopped and she stabilized.

The midwives stood around watching me do this emergency care rather than participating in it. I patiently attempted to engage the nurses to assist me and later led a discussion on what could have been done better. Although my voice remained calm, I think they could tell by my body language that I was not impressed with their efforts or the fact that they never attended the 'mandatory' workshop they agreed to. Adding to my frustration, as I was concluding my discussion with them, one of the midwives had the nerve to say, "Dr. Rob, what's the big deal about all of this anyways?" I couldn't believe my ears so responded, "I'm sorry, what did you say?" When she indignantly repeated her same words a fire started to burn inside me. I was just barely able to keep my verbal anger under control, but I'm sure my facial expression and its bright red color could no longer hide my disgust. "What the big deal is" I began, "is that this lady was bleeding to death while you were standing around watching instead of doing something to save her life". "What's even a bigger deal is that 2 women have died of this very same thing in the last few weeks and nobody seems to care. On top of that, it seems we are not willing to learn from our mistakes or care for our patients! I'm sorry, but when young women die having their babies, to me that is a big deal. That gets me upset. When children become orphans over a preventable complication of childbirth – that is a big deal to me!" At that point there was a long awkward silence and then the nurse quietly walked away.

I have since made peace with that nurse and our friendship and cooperation on the Maternity ward seems to have carried on despite our differences. I would like to be able to tell you that Obstetric care in Rundu is better now after my little temper tantrum that day, but it isn't. I would also like to tell you that my colleagues now share the same passion for life as me, but they don't. So has anything really changed for the better over my 2 ½ years doing Obstetrics/ Gynecology in Rundu?

Some days I feel heavy hearted because I think little has changed despite the long hours and hard work I have invested here. Have I accomplished anything as I poured my life into Maternity care in Namibia? Perhaps not, but maybe I am asking the wrong question? Is success as I define it really what it's all about? Maybe I should be asking different questions? Did I do my best to model love and compassion in my work? Did I serve each of my patients with dignity, respect, and give them the best care I could in this setting? Did I advocate for their justice when they faced abuse, neglect, and indifference?

I would rather be judged on these questions, than on what sustainable changes I've brought to Namibian Health Care. If only I could judge myself in that same light then maybe I could sleep better at night.

I've wrestled with a number of issues during my time in Namibia. Often my efforts at the hospital seemed more like exercises in futility. When I agreed to come to a Government Hospital in an obscure country where I was given little authority, and even less chance of implementing change; I knew that there were some things I was going to have to let go of. But in the surrendering process I also came to realize that there are some things that I will likely never be able to let go of, and maybe I never should. My obsessive nature, yearning for justice, and passion for life were given to me for a reason. Having said that, I never knew it would be so difficult to carry those traits into a setting where fatalism and apathy are the ethos of the day. It has been very challenging to step in with my Western training, standards, expectations, and zeal for life and have them frustrated on a daily basis.

It's easy for me to stand in judgment of this culture and all its shortcomings. But do I have the right to judge? After all, I come from a different world. I've been privileged to grow up in a loving home, with a Christian heritage,

Continued on p. 16

World

What do a billion Muslims really think?

The Gallup Poll of the Muslim World is the most comprehensive study ever done of this group. Many key results counter conventional wisdom. Since the momentous events of Sept. 11, 2001, countless news stories, TV commentaries, and books have speculated on the causes of terrorism, the attitudes of Muslims, and a purported clash of civilizations between Islamic societies and the West.

What has not been available is any reliable measure of the viewpoints of ordinary Muslims, who constitute 20 percent of the global population.

That is no longer the case. Through an ambitious six-year project that involved hour-long, face-to-face interviews with residents in nearly 40 nations, Gallup has plumbed the perspectives of Muslim men and women – urban and rural, educated and illiterate, young and old.

The Gallup Poll of the Muslim World surveyed a representative sample of 90 percent of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims, the most comprehensive study ever done. The findings are explored in the new book "Who Speaks for Islam?" By John Esposito, Islamic studies professor at Georgetown University; and Dalia Mogahed, executive director of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies in Washington.

Here are some of the key results, which frequently counter conventional wisdom:

How do Muslims view the West?

Among the things Muslims admire are the West's technology and fair political systems.

• When asked what they most admire about the West, Muslims pointed to (1) technology, (2) a value system of hard work, self-responsibility, rule of law, and cooperation, and (3) fair political systems, with respect for human rights, democracy, and gender equality.

• What they dislike the most about the West includes: denigration of Islam and Muslims, promiscuity, and ethical and moral corruption.

• What they admire least about their own Muslim societies includes: lack of unity, economic and political corruption, and extremism.

• Most Muslims agree on what the West should do first to improve relations: demonstrate more respect, show more understanding of Islam as a religion, and not denigrate what it stands for. The issues that drive radicals are also important to mainstream Muslims, but they differ in their priorities and the degree of politicization and alienation. Moderate Muslims next hope for Western policies that support economic development. Radicals are more focused on the West discriminating less against Muslims and refraining from interference in the internal affairs of Muslim countries.

• As for the actions that Muslims themselves could take to improve relations, those surveyed recommended: respect the West's optimism and values of freedom of speech and religion, reduce and control extremism and terrorism, and "modernize."

Is Islam compatible with democracy?

Many cite the equal importance of democracy and Islam to the progress of the Muslim world.

• Large majorities cite the equal importance of democracy and Islam to the quality of life and progress of the Muslim world. They see no contradiction between democratic values and religious principles.

• Political freedoms are among the things they admire most about the West.

• Substantial majorities in nearly all nations say that if drafting a new constitution, they would guarantee freedom of speech.

• Most want neither theocracy nor secular democracy but a third model in which religious principles and democratic values coexist. They want their own democratic model that draws on Islamic law as a source.

• Significant majorities say religious leaders should play no direct role in drafting a constitution, writing legislation, determining foreign policy, or deciding how women dress in public.

How do Muslims view women's rights?

Many Muslims believe that women should have the right to vote and to hold any job outside the home that they qualify for.

• Majorities in most countries believe that women should have the same legal rights as men: They should have the right to vote, to hold any job outside the home that they qualify for, and to hold leadership positions at the cabinet and national council levels .

• Majorities of men in virtually every country (including 62 percent in Saudi Arabia, 73 percent in Iran, and 81 percent in Indonesia) agree that women should be able to work at any job they qualify for.

• In Saudi Arabia, where women cannot vote, 58 percent of men say women should be able to vote.

• While Muslim women favor gender parity, they do not endorse wholesale adoption of Western values.

What makes a radical?

When asked why they supported the 9/11 attacks, the radicals gave political rather than religious reasons. Various studies of Muslim terrorists show that most are not graduates of madrassahs but of private or public schools and universities; most are from middle- and working-class backgrounds; some are devout and others are not. This survey confirms these findings:

• Among the Muslims surveyed, 7 percent condoned the 9/11 attacks. The study terms these the "politically radicalized."

• When asked why they supported the attacks, the radicals gave political rather than religious reasons. They have a sense of political frustration and feel humiliated and threatened by the West. Those who opposed the attacks often gave religious reasons for doing so.

• The radicals, on average, are not the down-and-out people in society. They are more educated than moderates, and two-thirds of radicals have average or above-average income. Forty-seven percent supervise others at work. They are more optimistic about their own lives than are moderates (52 percent to 45 percent).

• Radicals are no more religious than the general population and do not attend mosque more frequently.

• What distinguishes them is not their perception of Western culture or freedoms, but their perception of US policies. Even radicals say they support democracy. But 63 percent of radicals do not believe that the United States will allow people in the region to fashion their own political future without direct US influence.

MBUDI ZA NDOKOTORA *cont. from p.15*

and a protestant work ethic that embraces constructive change, celebrates success, and cherishes life. I never faced generations of apartheid or discrimination. I was never made to feel that I was less than human. I never dabbled in witchcraft or had the constant pressure of appeasing the spirits that surround me for fear of death. I never had to worry about whether I would eat today or would be left abandoned tomorrow. I never faced abuse or betrayal by the ones that were supposed to protect me.

I have learned many things during my time in Namibia, most of which I am still processing and will continue to do so for months ahead. I have much to learn yet about this culture and how I can be an instrument of healing to it. I also have more to learn about myself and this journey God has taken me on.

But here are a few things I have learned so far:

- Obedience to God's call is more important than passing pleasure or peace for the moment.
- True contentment comes with realizing you are right where God wants you to be, even if where you are really sucks sometimes.
- It's better for me to take my mind off the 'what ifs' and focus instead on 'what could be'.

I've also come to appreciate that love is indeed the greatest of all. Love should be what defines me as both a person and a doctor. It should be what motivates my actions. It is what I want to be remembered for when my journey is done. I confess there are many days that I fail when it comes to love. There are days when other agendas and desires distract me from what is truly important, but it is love that brings life back into focus. Without love, my life and my medical ministry are failures; just a bunch of meaningless noise-like a clanging cymbal.

So, is there hope for Rundu State Hospital and the people it serves? Of course there is. As long as there is love, there is hope. Love never fails.

So what now? Soon I will return to Canada with my family and start the next chapter of this journey. Perhaps God will bring us back to Rundu again in the near future. Or perhaps a different story will be written for us. I don't have all the answers and I don't claim to know where our path is headed. I do not walk this journey alone; I simply take one step at a time, following the light of my guide. I am not the author of this story.

I am but a small character; privileged to have been chosen for this part of the script. Thanks for sharing this chapter with me.

By His Love and His Light,
Ndokotora Rob

The 'tribe' playing together in our Rundu backyard

The CRC and Fundamentalism

Bert den Boggende

In a previous article I traced fundamentalism back to *The Fundamentals*, which were published nearly a century ago. Although no CRC member wrote an essay for *The Fundamentals*, CRC members, then and now, would have agreed with the core essays, which emphasized the plenary inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, Jesus' deity, virgin birth, bodily resurrection, and substitutionary atonement. There can be no doubt that the CRC had (and has) a lot in common with fundamentalism. So why then did James Schaap, following Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven, warn the CRC against fundamentalism? Schaap did not really elaborate. What follows is an attempt at explaining the relationship between the CRC and fundamentalism.

After the publication of *The Fundamentals* fundamentalism became a movement that had significant consequences for several denominations. For instance, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists and Disciples of Christ experienced dissension and/or splits. The CRC also experienced a separation, leading to the Protestant Reformed Church, of which there are only two congregations in Canada, in Edmonton and Lacombe. The dispute centered mainly on the issue of common grace and at first glance seems unrelated to fundamentalism. However, I want to suggest that the two are related. Abraham Kuyper's ideas about claiming all of human existence for Christ had attracted some in the CRC. His notions of common grace built a bridge to society and made it possible to interact with its cultural activities. But in the 1920s CRC synods condemned such activities as movies, theater going, dancing, and playing cards. Such condemnation followed an old Protestant tradition, but it was reinvigorated by fundamentalism. The theological dispute of the 1920s can best be understood against the background of turning away from popular cultural activities.

A closer look at the origins of the CRC may help explain why the CRC condemned these activities. During the seventeenth century many Dutch Calvinists were dissatisfied with the *Gereformeerde Kerk*, the semi-state church. They wanted a further reformation, something the Dutch political leaders did not want. Many of these pious Calvinists decided to worship separately from the semi-state church in conventicles. In 1834 many of these pious people separated from the church, by then called the *Hervormde Kerk*. Many of these Separatists, *de Afgescheidenen*, emigrated to the United States after 1846. After a brief connection with the Reformed Church of America, they formed their own denomination in 1857, the CRC. Part of the heritage of these early CRC members was a piety that had turned away from society. Kuyper's notions of interactive piety differed significantly from those of the early CRC members. While his ideas had made some inroads, it was quite easy to refer back to the earlier pious tradition. Put differently, the negative attitude to much of what society offered was really a continuation of traditional piety, a piety reinforced by fundamentalism.

While *The Fundamentals* discussed hallowing Sunday (D. H. Martin, "Why Save the Lord's Day?"), it was not a totally negative Sabbatarianism. Fundamentalism re-emphasized the negative don'ts. In the 1950s the CRC Men's Societies Federation's League and Social Action allied itself with the Lord's Day Alliance in order to "combat the flagrant violation of the Sabbath." But many members went far beyond the "flagrant violation." About four decades ago, during my first teaching experience in Canada, I asked my students which day they disliked most, and to my surprise the majority answered Sunday. While the details varied, these grade 4 and 5 students were generally not allowed to be active. Instead of a day to enjoy, Sunday had become a day of don'ts.

In 1925 the notorious Scopes trial was held in Tennessee. While *The Fundamentals* had discussed Darwinism and rejected it, there was no full agreement about the age of the earth and universe. Some favoured seventeenth-century Irish Anglican archbishop James Ussher's dating that creation had occurred some 4000 years before Christ's birth, while others were willing to interpret creation "days" as undefined, though limited, lengths of time. Fundamentalism, however, did not accept this longer time frame, insisting on a literal interpretation of days. Many CRC members agreed with this literalism and ever since it has been a divisive issue for many a CRC member. One of my colleagues once stated that evolution should not be discussed and only be condemned. Her attitude was more in line with that of fundamentalism than with *The Fundamentals*, never mind that of Kuyper. In fact, the narrow literalism of fundamentalism was not even compatible with Calvin, who in theory had no objection to interpret days as periods.

There can be no doubt that the anti-Roman Catholic attitude of fundamentalism was no different from that of many CRC members. In fact, it was a rather common attitude of Protestants. Certainly the wording in the *Heidelberg Catechism* in reference to the mass did not contribute to a loving attitude to Catholics. Again, tradition was reinforced by fundamentalism.

The Fundamentals referred several times to Christ's second coming, but there was very little discussion about the time of his return. There was no mention of a-, pre-, or post-millennialism. Using a narrow literalism, fundamentalism opted for premillennialism, which had begun influencing many North American denominations in the nineteenth century, and has continued to do so. Premillennialism, however, is not the position of the CRC, which in its teachings has adhered to a-millennialism. Nevertheless, some hymns influenced by premillennialism found their way into the Psalter Hymnal. Such words as "rapture," which does not occur in Scripture, may indicate a premillennialist stance.

Scene from the Scopes trial

In synodical decisions and attitude the CRC veered towards fundamentalism in the 1920s. It may be asked whether or not the seventeen Canadian CRC congregations existing before WW II differed from those in the USA. It does not seem likely. American ministers preached in these churches and the Canadian ecclesiastical scene, especially the Baptists, was also influenced by fundamentalism. If I am right, the CRC moved away from fundamentalism in the 1960s. Perhaps the clearest indication is the reversal of synodical decisions of four decades earlier concerning movies. But there are other indicators.

For a thorough research I would have to consult such church publications as *The Banner* and *De Wachter*. Not having access to them, I use some old issues of *The Federation Messenger*, a publication for the CRC's men's societies. Years ago I got hold of sixteen issues dating between 1956 and 1971. Since every year seven issues were published, the ones I have are only a fraction of the total. Nevertheless, they indicate a changing mentality.

The contents of the early issues becomes reasonably clear from, for instance, the March 1956 issue: editorials, Bible study outlines, history of the Christian church, home and family, distinctive Reformed practices, and federation news. About half of the thirty pages were used for the outlines and that continued at least until 1971. While the focus of the early issues was on the church and family, the later issues contained material that occupied the attention of society. A speech about "Relevant Christian Living – In The Family" given at the 1968 convention opened with the words, "*The cry for relevancy is the adamant cry of today*, and it is addressed to all of the institutions of society." (Sept. 1968). Another speech at that convention looked at employment, housing, political activity, education, especially in connection with the Negro. The 1968 November issue contained two articles on birth control; the 1969 March issue stated on its cover "Let's Go to the Movies." A year later *The Federation Messenger* had been renamed *The Messenger*, but it continued with such societal issues as social welfare (November 1970), protest (December 1970), and abortion (March 1971).

While the early issues were inward looking, the later ones contained articles that were outward looking. Unquestionably the material published for these men's societies reflected the church as a whole. A new mentality was evident, but it is not so clear whether societal changes or Kuyperian ideas were the major force underlying the new mentality. Certainly the cry for relevancy is not the same as claiming the whole of human existence for Christ.

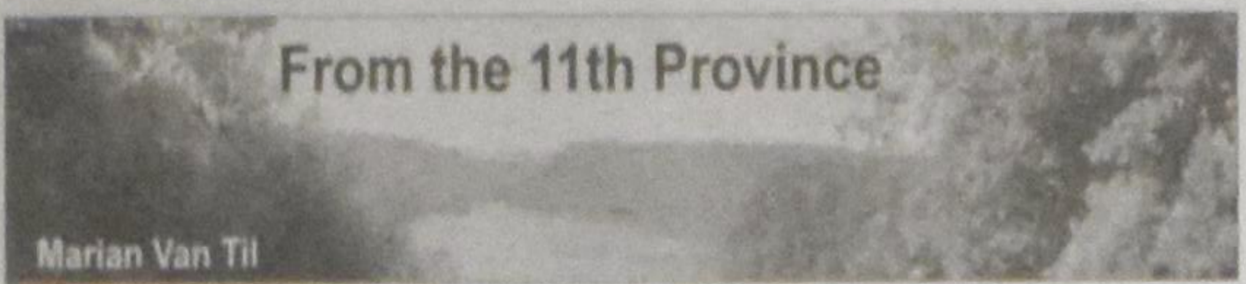
Moreover, Kuyper's interactive piety had become restricted in the Netherlands in the 1920s and 1930s and it may be questioned if many new Canadian and American Dutch emigrants took his vibrant piety along (not withstanding Agnes Amelink's publications, my own research at least leads me to question it). Be that as it may, there is no need to make a choice between the two; rather, Kuyper's common grace and "square inch" claim provide the framework within which the "cry for relevancy" can be discussed.

So what did the CRC and fundamentalism have in common? Both were theologically orthodox; politically they favoured the Republicans in the USA and the Conservatives in Canada; economically they objected to much government interference, and socially they emphasized the family and objected to many cultural activities. Yet there were also differences. The CRC was never so narrowly literalistic in its Scriptural interpretations. It held to a significantly different understanding of Christ's second coming. In its defence of common grace the CRC undermined, probably without realizing it, its negative approach to society. Ultimately these differences made fundamentalism incompatible with the CRC.

For James Schaap's speech, see his "What about a Bicentennial? Mr. and Mrs. CRC," *Pro Rege* 36:1 (Sept. 2007): 18-38; for "square inch", see Roger Henderson, "Kuyper's Inch," *Pro Rege* 36:3 (March 2008): 12-14.

Bert den Boggende, Brooks, AB

Reflections



Who's bound? Who's determined?

Do you ever consider what it would be like to have grown up in a different Christian tradition than the one – presumably Reformed – that formed you and your faith and still influences your attitudes and actions? Naturally, I'm not asking in order to force a comparison between ourselves and other Christians so that we Calvinists can feel superior (or even to find ourselves wanting).

I myself have considered that question over my forty years of participating in worship as an organist in seven or eight denominations besides my own Christian Reformed Church, and through getting to know members of those churches. I have found that interaction with other Christians, their theology and practice has nudged me to re-evaluate my own beliefs and practice. Still, especially if you're content where you are you might ask, "Why should I wonder about what other Christians believe? God has placed me where I am, and in his wisdom and grace that place is within the Reformed family that is part of the larger family of God."

I, too, believe God has placed each of us where we are. That's a biblical notion. If we read Scripture rightly (which I believe we Calvinists do, mostly) we will refuse to believe we are masters and mistresses of our own affairs; and on the other hand, we will be prevented from seeing ourselves as at the mercy of a prowling Satan.

The Enemy unleashed

I recently re-met a peculiarly evangelical view of God and his control of his world. Some evangelicals recognize the pitfalls of the view I'll describe, so perhaps it's ironic that it is a view that more and more Reformed Christians (and even Catholics and other Christians) are adopting, or at least being influenced by. It is a view that I will call "This is the Devil's world, but God can wrest control – if we ask him to and believe he will." Consonant with that approach is the absence of a "Kingdom view" as Reformed people understand it. Christ is not currently reigning, and he won't until the Rapture when he returns to reign on earth for a thousand years. That explains why Satan is "reigning" here on earth here and now.

My recent encounter with this view came via a handful of the 14 books I was required to read for a Canadian Christian writers' competition. This competition is held annually and I am frequently asked to be one of the judges, a job I enjoy. This year my category was independently published books. The subject matter could be anything as long as a book's publication was initiated by its author and not published by a conventional publisher. This allowed some good books to be published which otherwise might not have seen the light of day. But it also allowed material that should have been revised or removed to remain in some of these books, since most of the authors did not hire an insightful professional editor to review his or her work.

I can't reveal the titles of the particular books I'm thinking of in the context of this column – the awards ceremony has yet to be held; nor am I acting as a reviewer here. But I can say that several of the books I was asked to read exhibited the view of God's presence and action in the world that I've just mentioned.

Spirit of fairness required

I should explain that adjudicators are required to refrain from judging a book based on whether or not they agree with its premise. As long as the author writes well, makes cogent points and clear arguments in defense of his or her writing, and fulfills his or her own stated goal in writing the book, a book deserves good marks. That rule for judges is understandable; a judge may otherwise become too subjective and personal. The result could well be unfair to an author whose views the judge dislikes or dismisses. (As well as awarding points for specific writing elements, judges must include comments addressed to each author.)

A spirit of fairness becomes all the more important when the subject matter has to do with living the Christian life, and when the author quotes and interprets Scripture in a manner that Christians throughout much of church history would not recognize and might even consider spiritually dangerous.

God enabled by our reaction

One book did an admirable job of addressing people who view God as an ogre out to get them. The author herself was such a person, and she recounted the story of her conversion and change of heart and mind. Her book is both a kind of autobiography and a manual for how to approach specific kinds of problems and "begin the journey of intimacy with [God] that far surpasses any earthly desire."

There is much in the book that is helpful to people whose relationship with God needs serious repair. Yet I became gradually more uneasy about the power that was being allotted to both "the Enemy" and to our human will. (I won't get into what difference being "saved" might or might not have on the will.) For example, the author says the Lord told her to fast on a particular day. She wasn't inclined to do it but did so anyway. Then that afternoon on the way to her friend's house for prayer she was involved in an accident which did $2500 damage to her car. She felt angry at God, as though that was her "reward" for obeying him. However, at that point she choose to "cast out those lies of the enemy" and "God ministered to me, and showed me that *because of my obedience, He was able* to spare me from a far greater accident" (my emphasis).

This is one example of many of the belief that Satan, the Enemy, is in control in the world but is thwarted when *we* react to him by asking God to "cast him out," in turn, *allowing* God to do so. God is not sovereign, nor is he holding Satan on a short leash, as it were. Current events make it look like Satan and his dark minions are calling the shots, and indeed he is, according to this view.

A mystery beyond logic

I believe that this approach developed as a way of explaining the evil, suffering and calamity in the world without making it look like God had, or has, anything to do with it. It's a very understandable approach. The Calvinist – and, I believe, biblical – approach that acknowledges that God can do, and does, what he pleases because he is God is a much harder sell because there is simply no answer that employs logic, no path guided by human reason, that will lead us to be able to explain how God can simultaneously be wholly in control of the universe and all that happens in it (even of the sparrow falling), including having "all our days are written in his book," even while not being the author of evil and these calamities, and holding us responsible for our own actions.

What the Bible actually teaches in this regard is one of incomprehensible mysteries of our faith in the God who is both the majestic providential God of the universe and our intimately loving Father and Redeemer, merciful as well as just. If we could understand this paradox we would be like God.

God would love to give you wealth

There was one other troubling idea that cropped up in several of the books I read: that we have a "divine right" to both health and wealth because God desires to prosper his people. One of these books was written to help Christian readers mend their spiritual relationship with money. It advocated embracing wealth – as much material prosperity as possible, don't be shy about telling God what you want – because God wants you to be happy, and you're going to use it for God's work (right?). Early on, in fact, there is an "I like money" exercise. In fairness to the author, there were small *good* points sprinkled throughout the book, but the main point was based on a biblically questionable premise popular in many evangelical circles today: Because God is a good God he wants to give good things to you, and "good things" means good *material* things as well as good health. So we live according to God's laws (as much as we can) for our own benefit as much as for God's, *so that* God will bless us and we, in turn, can praise him.

There is no notion in this worldview of saying with Job, "The LORD gives, the LORD takes away. Blessed be the name of the LORD." Or of suffering, including materially, for Christ's sake. Nor even of living moderately and as good stewards of how ever much or little God grants us.

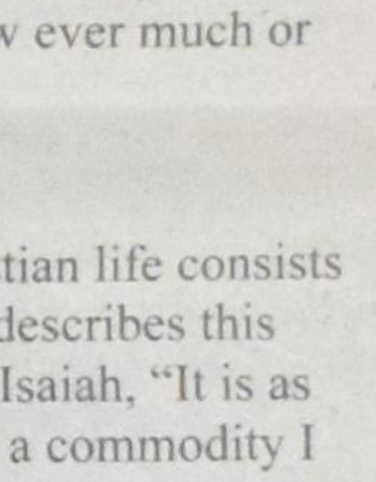
Absolute submission

It seems to me that this kind of Christian life consists of bartering with God. As John Oswalt describes this in his *NIV Application Commentary* on Isaiah, "It is as though we say, 'Alright, God, you have a commodity I want, and I have some things you want. So let's engage in a little trade. I give you what you want and you give me what I want....'" (p. 683).

It is not wealth itself but the *love of it* that is the root of all kinds of evil, says Timothy. Jesus himself warns us in the Gospels (numerous times, in various ways) how difficult it is for us to be single-mindedly focused on our service to God when we have wealth. It easily becomes a burden (or a millstone, perhaps) instead a blessing.

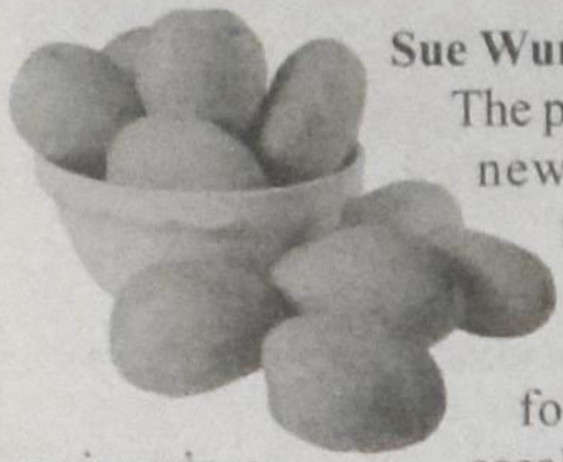
The antidote to denying God's sovereignty, to giving the Devil more than his due, and to bartering for God's blessings is an absolute, total, abject surrender of our entire selves – hearts, minds and wills – to the one God who assures us he created us, redeemed us and will forever sustain us. That surrender will grow as we daily hang on his every Word and as we pray "without ceasing." Then we will know that God is the LORD; and that Satan will never snatch us out of his hand.

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier *from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY. She may be contacted by email at: mvantil@roadrunner.com or via her website: www.wordpowerpublishing.com*



Homage to the humble spud

In the world of food, potatoes are finally in the limelight.



Sue Wunder (CSM)

The potato is making news these days, not only for its potential role in global food security as grain prices escalate, but also as an income-generator for growers in many countries and as an ally in the developed world's quest for nutritional sanity. Boiled, potatoes pack more protein than corn and nearly twice the calcium. If you don't believe me, ask the nonprofit International Potato Center in Lima, Peru (the country where potatoes originated some 8,000 years ago), which also notes that potatoes contain lots of other nutrients – and, well, taste good.

The United Nations has weighed in as well, naming 2008 the International Year of the Potato, a "hidden treasure" of a tuber.

I have heeded these messages, but these folks are preaching to a member of the choir here. Potatoes are among my top choices of what to eat any time of day, and the basis for a sizable personal cookbook of meals and memories.

My worst childhood faux pas – chattily remarking to a teacher we'd invited for lunch that the ceramic soup bowls were "just like the one our dog eats out of" without explaining that a chipped companion had been demoted for dog use – was closely seconded by asking, just as my mother served Thanksgiving dinner to a long table of relatives, "Are those real mashed potatoes?"

In my and my mother's defense, there was no time like the 1950s for serving up powdered and packaged versions of fresh foods. Instant potatoes were a weekday staple in our home, but they paled against potatoes freshly cooked and beaten with butter and cream for holidays. At the age of 10, I was helpless to ignore that distinction for the sake of protocol or my mother's pride.

Time or occasion permitting, she made wonderful "real" mashed spuds as well as delicious twice_baked potatoes. These were named "Mrs. Corwin potatoes," after another teacher who shared a meal of them with us (without benefit of my commentary on the china).

Potatoes, cheap and filling, helped sustain me in graduate school. When I emerged with a degree in geology, I avoided oil company employment by heading off to milk cows on a farm in southwest England. There I met Mrs. Cridge, who knew all about the potential of potatoes. On raw, wintry mornings as I headed to the cow barn, she would arrive from a neighboring village to do the household's cooking and washing up with a freshly baked and steaming tuber in her pocket – hand warmer and lunch, all in one perfect oval.

I was raised on big Idaho bakers, but I've subsequently discovered what rich varieties of this humble food exist in their unassuming mesh bags and supermarket bins. In fact – once again provided by the International Potato Center – some 5,000 types of potatoes grow worldwide. Belarus leads the world in potato consumption, each inhabitant of the eastern European state downing more than 377 pounds a year.

I believe my own household might come close to that. Yukon Golds, reds, and baby versions of each are among our favorites. We eat them mashed, steamed, boiled, or baked; fried into hash browns; and in soups, curries, and salads. It just wouldn't be home without a sack of spuds hanging from their hook in the kitchen – lumpy with humble promise.

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Classifieds

Birth

With joy and thanksgiving to our Lord
Brandon & Trish Murray
(nee Scholten)
announce the safe arrival
of their third son

Carter Brandon
weighing 6 lb. 13 oz.
on May 10, 2008.

Carter is welcomed by his brothers
Cole and Devin.
He is the 10th grandchild for
Jack & Theresa Scholten and
3rd for Steve & Sherri Murray.
Another great-grandchild
for Alice Van Gyssel.

Wedding

Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
Ephesians 5:20-21 (Wedding text)

Ralph & Ruth Veldstra *of Jarvis, Ont.* and
John & Pauline Schotsman *of Waterdown, Ont.* are happy to
announce the forthcoming marriage of their son and daughter

ANTHONY SAKE AND MONIQUE JANINE

Believing that God has brought them together,
this celebration of their love will take place on Saturday
June 7, 2008 in the Calvin Chr. Ref. Church
of Dundas, Ont. with Rev Paul VandenBrink officiating.
Our prayer is that the Lord will bless Anthony and Monique
as they begin their new life together.

Their future address will be: 149 Concession 7 RR 1
Jarvis ON N0A 1J0

Obituaries

June 4, 1927 — May 11, 2008
Haren, NL — Thunder Bay, ON

JOHN STAAL

Went home to be with his LORD

Husband of Lammie Staal, *Thunder Bay, ON*
Father of
Arthur & Ina Staal, *Thunder Bay, ON*
Trudy & Pete Kuipers, *Lacombe, AB*
Gary & Daune Staal, *Thunder Bay, ON*
Henry & Linda Staal, *Thunder Bay, ON*
Norman & Karen Staal, *Thunder Bay, ON*
Opa of
22 grandchildren & 14 great-grandchildren

A memorial service was held on May 14 at
First CRC in Thunder Bay, ON.

RR 6 Hwy 130, Thunder Bay, ON P7C 5N5

The Lord called her home – Psalm 27.
On Tuesday May 6, 2008 at her home,

CLARA DE SCHIFFART-REITSMA

went to glory at the age of 103 years.

Beloved wife of the late Gerrit De Schiffart.

Dear mother of Sidney & Mary De Schiffart, Hinke Weima and Wilma Vanden Berg.

Predeceased by her daughter Evelyn Dykema and sons-in-law Klaas Dykema, David Weima and Martin Vanden Berg, infant son Jacob, two great-grandchildren, and thirteen siblings in the Netherlands.

Remembered with much love by her twenty-three grandchildren and their spouses, eighty-one great-grandchildren and three great-great-grandchildren.

A memorial service was held in Bethel Christian Reformed Church, Brockville, Ontario on Saturday May 10 with Pastor N. Cornelisse officiating.

Correspondence: W. Vanden Berg
Unit 5 – 1175 Millwood Avenue
Brockville ON K6V 7LS

WILLEMINA SCHEP(nee Mourik)

Passed away peacefully at Stevenson Memorial Hospital, Alliston on Tuesday April 22nd, 2008 in her 92nd year.

Beloved wife of the late Peter Schep.
Dear mother of: Arie & Judy Schep *of Guelph*,
Willy & the late Ralph Hollema *of Alliston*,
Diane & John van Campen *of Utopia*,
Nel & John Geddes *of Aurora*,
Janet & Ted Vandevis *of Alliston* and
Betty Ann & Don Duggan *of Alliston*.
Predeceased by Audrey Schep in 1952.
Lovingly remembered by her
20 grandchildren and 26 great-grandchildren.
Survived by one sister Audrey de Ruiter and one
brother Bill Mourik and sister-in-law Irene Mourik

Visitation was held at the W. John Thomas Funeral Home. Funeral service was held in the Christian Reformed Church of Alliston, Monday, April 28th. Interment Alliston Union Cemetery. If desired donations to The Stevenson Memorial Hospital Foundation would be appreciated.

AREND HOEKSTRA

passed away peacefully at his home in Port Rowan
surrounded by his family on
Thursday May 15, 2008, in his 80th year.

Beloved husband of Femmy (Abma) whom he married September 27, 1956.

Dear father of Jelke & wife Serena *of Kelowna, British Columbia*, Tena Hoekstra & her husband Neil Opthof *of Calgary Alberta*, Betty Hoekstra of *Guelph, Ontario*, Oscar of *Bowen Island, British Columbia* and Gail Hoekstra & husband Jeff Krell also *of Guelph*.

He will be sadly missed by his 9 grandchildren. He is also survived by his sisters Geeske, Alberta and Hiltsje all in the Netherlands.

Born in Friesland, Netherlands he graduated as a deep sea navigator from the Nautical School of Terschelling and became a Second Officer with the Dutch Merchant Marines. Arend was a member of the Long Point Lions Club, Port Rowan Community Church and the Simcoe Christian Reformed Church. He taught in Norfolk County School System for 20 Years. He was also the Harbour Master for 9 years in Port Rowan.

Relatives and friends called at the Jeffrey W. Glendinning Funeral Home, Port Rowan. Funeral Service was at the Port Rowan Community Church on Tuesday May 20, 2008 with Pastors Bill Wiebe and Wieger DeJong officiating. Interment at Bayview Cemetery Port Rowan. In lieu of flowers, donations to the Gideons and Amnesty International (cheques accepted) would be appreciated by the family.

Address for condolences: Femmy Hoekstra
11 Front Street Box 363, Port Rowan ON N0E 1M0

May 21, 1938 - May 16, 2008
BEATRIX HOFSTEE (nee de Blieck)
rests safe in the arms of Jesus
Husband: John Hofstee
Children:
Janet & Ed van Veen, (Tara and Kyle)
Susan & Ron Greydanus (Carmen)
Mark & Anitra Hofstee (Lauren, Kirstin, Bethany, Jillian)
Michae & Michelle Hofstee (Heather, Holly, Darryl)
770 Napier Street West, Listowel ON N4W 3S9
e-mail: jhofstee@sgci.com

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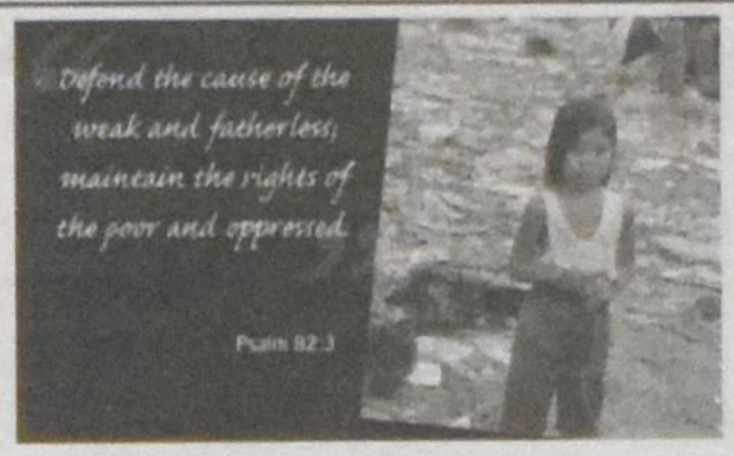

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or **1-902-228-2615**

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or email cmstruyk@puc.net

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For further information contact:
Emma Winter, Chair of the Finance Committee
1 – 905 – 563-4681
or
Darren DeCaire, Controller/Manager of Finance
12 Bartlett Avenue, Grimsby, ON L3M 4N5
1 - 905 - 945-9631

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Classifieds / Job Opportunities

Classified Rates

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION
Christian Courier is published on alternate Mondays. Copy deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Tuesday, 13 days prior to publication date.
RATE: (GST added to rates listed)
All personal and family announcements: $6.00 per square inch. **rose@christiancourier.ca**
Display advertising re. businesses and organizations: $8.00 per square inch. email: **ads@christiancourier.ca**
PHOTOS: There is a processing fee of $25 for the inclusion of a photograph with a personal or family announcement. Photo space is not charged per square inch but we reserve the right to determine published photo size. Please note that we cannot use a faxed photo. We need either an original photo (which we will return) or a downloadable internet image.
PERSONAL ADS: *Christian Courier* would be pleased to handle your personal ad in an efficient and discreet manner. The cost to set up a personal file under a unique file number is $25. Ads requesting correspondence with this file are run at $8 P.I. per insertion. All correspondence is immediately forwarded unopened.
NEWLYWEDS & NEW PARENTS: We offer a $25 one-year subscription to couples whose wedding is announced in *Christian Courier* and to parents who announce a child's birth in our paper. If you want to take advantage of this offer, please let us know when placing your ad.
SUBMITTING YOUR AD
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5 Joanna Dr
St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
fax: 905-682-8313 e-mail: see above
OTHER INFORMATION: *Christian Courier* reserves the right to print classifieds using our usual format and editing style and is not responsible for any errors due to hand-written or phoned-in advertisements.

Cleaning with the environment in mind

1. Try the tried and true old fashioned mixture of vinegar and water (half and half) – pour it into a refillable spray bottle and you can even add a touch of lemon, lavender, or orange zest if you'd like the fresh smell! Add a half-cup of baking soda or borax to the mixture to conquer the tougher stains.
2. Disposable cleaning wipes, even the recycled-eco types, still contribute immensely to the congested landfills in our communities and globally. Instead, try organic cotton, hemp, or lint-free microfibre cloths to wipe away dirt, streak free! At best, take old cotton white t-shirts and cut them into your ideal sizes!
3. A great way to recycle your old newspapers, even before you throw them into the blue bin, is to dap them with a little H2O & white vinegar mixture and apply it to windows or any glass top for a streak free clean.
4. Hang your clothes to dry for a more economically and environmentally friendly result. If you have a dryer, try to refrain from using fabric softeners, which are loaded with chemicals. To get rid of static cling, try a ball of aluminum foil. It works!

Julia Woolnough

Job opportunity ads recently run in *Christian Courier*, can be found on our website: **christiancourier.ca/Jobs.htm**

YOUTH DIRECTOR

Clinton CRC seeks a dynamic and energetic leader for our youth and young adult ministries. We are praying for a person that has a love for Christ, a passion for youth, good interpersonal and leadership skills. Working with an advisory committee you will develop a relational ministry from a reformed perspective.
For a complete job description, send résumé's to
Clinton CRC,
P.O. Box 697, Clinton, ON N0M 1L0
or email to **clintoncrc@tcc.on.ca**
and we will send the description to you.

Director for Youth and Family Program

BETHEL CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH, a vibrant church of 150 families in Newmarket, Ontario, is seeking a director with a passion for children/youth and a love for the Lord. If you want to inspire youth to embrace Christ as the focus of their life and encourage parents to have an active role in the spiritual development of their children, request a complete job description at youthministry@newmarketcrc.ca or call (905)895-8341.
This is a full-time 3 year contract position with a competitive salary based on qualifications/experience.

DUNCAN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH, a church of about 100 families located in Duncan, BC on Vancouver Island, is seeking

a full time experienced pastor
and an associate pastor to youth

for our multi-generational church. The candidates should have a passion for preaching the gospel and also be able to relate to individual members. A church profile is also available. All potential applicants please direct all inquiries to: Bill Wikkerink, Pastor Search Committee,
930 Trunk Rd. Duncan, BC V9L 2S1
or contact him by phone (250) 743-9276 or email: willswikk@shaw.ca

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Edgar Veldman - Vice Principal
3608 Sparks Street
Terrace, BC V8G 2V6
Phone (250) 635-6173 Fax (250) 635-9385
Email ccs@telus.net Website www.centennialchristian.ca

Director of Finance and Administration

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Please apply in writing only.

THE HOPE CENTRE seeks up to **3 university or college students** to work for us this summer in the Hope Centre in Brampton, Ontario. We are an interdenominational inner city Christian Drop. Your job will be to serve visitors to the Hope Centre, to listen to visitors, to share the Hope of the Gospel, to support the work of the ministry, and to report to the coordinator of the Hope Centre.
Contact the Hope Centre at **905-790-2273**
or Tony Papasidero tsidero@hotmail.com
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Know someone who may enjoy reading the Christian Courier?Let us know their name and address and we will send the next three issues to them at no cost. Call Rose at **1-800-969-4838** or email: **rose@christiancourier.ca**

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Princeton – CHOR	8:00 am	1400
Smithers – CFBV	9:15 am	1230
Vernon – CJIB	9:30 pm	94

ALBERTA

Brooks – CIBQ	8:30 am	1340
Edmonton – CJCA	6:00 pm	930

MANITOBA

Winnipeg – CKJS	9:00 am	810

ONTARIO

Atikokan – CFAK	9:30 am	1240
Chatham – CFCO	6:30 am	630
Hamilton – CHAM	7:30 am	820
London – CKSL	7:00 am	1410
Owen Sound – CFOS	7:00 am	560
Sarnia – CHOK	7:30 am	1070
Stratford – CJCS	8:45 am	1240
Wingham – CKNX	10:30 am	920
Woodstock – CJFH	7:30 am	94.03

NEW BRUNSWICK

Saint John – CHSJ	9:00 am	94.1

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Charlottetown – CFCY	7:00 am	630

NOVA SCOTIA

Digby – CKDY	6:00 am	1420
Halifax – CFDR	8:30 am	780
Liverpool – CKBW	7:30 am	94.5
Kentville – CKEN	8:30 am	1490
Middleton – CKAD	8:30 am	1350
Shelburne – CKBW	7:30 am	93.1
Sydney – CJCB	7:00 am	1270
Weymouth – CKDY	8:30 am	103.1
Windsor – CFAB	8:30 am	1450

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Nordegg CHBW 93.9 FM	Sun. 8:30 am
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Prince Rupert CIAJ 100.7 FM	Sat. 10 am

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS - 2008

May 25 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Herman Praamsma will be preaching.

May 30 Liberation choir spring interlude concerts 7:30 pm. at Mountainview CRC, **Grimsby**.

May 30 Noon-hour Organ Reictal featuring Brent Fifield (Music Director at Christ Church Cathedral, Hamilton) at St. Jude's Anglican Church, **Brantford**, 12:15 pm. (wvan08@rogers.com)

May 31, June 7, June 8 Calvary CRC, **Ottawa**, 50th anniversary events and worship. Join us in celebrating at events on May 31, June 7 (by reservation) and the morning worship service at 10 am on June 8,. More information at www.calvarycrc.ca or contact Linda at 613-821-1911 or lindamallette@hotmail.com

June 2,3 Calvin Theological Seminary invites you to "Retreat and Equip". More info at www.calvinseminary.edu/continuingEd or phone Andrew Beunk at 905-643-4340. See ad this issue.

June 2 -5 Milk & Honey summer festival at Redeemer University College. For more information or to register, call 905.648.2139 ext.4521 or go to www.redeemer.ca under News & Events

June 6 & 7 The 50th anniversary of **Wellandport** Christian School Reunion Celebration. See ad.

June 11 Hollandse Dag, 10 am, at the **Moorefield** community centre. For more information contact Hilbert Rumph at 519-638-2053 or see ad in this issue.

June 18 Hollandse Dag 10:00 Am at First Christian Reformed Church, 310 Kingscourt Ave. **Kingston**. Spreker:Rev. Carl D. Tuyl. For info call (613) 546-5615

June 21, 22 All Nations CRC anniversary celebrations. **Halifax**, NS The celebration begins 6 p.m. June 21 with a traditional All Nations Potluck, followed by a variety show. On Sunday we will have a special worship service at 10 a.m., which will be followed by a picnic. We would love to see past members and old friends again – email info@allnationscrc.org or call 902-429-7136. See ads in previous issues.

July 1 Frisian Picnic at the Pinehurst Lake Conservation area, **Paris**, ON 11 am Contact: frydkedei@hotmail.com

WELLANDPORT CHRISTIAN SCHOOL
50th Anniversary 1958-2008

The 50th anniversary of Wellandport Christian School is a time to reflect, with gratitude, God's faithfulness to the WCS community.
Plan to attend.

Friday, June 6, 2008
Celebration Program
Riverside CRC, Wellandport
7:30 pm

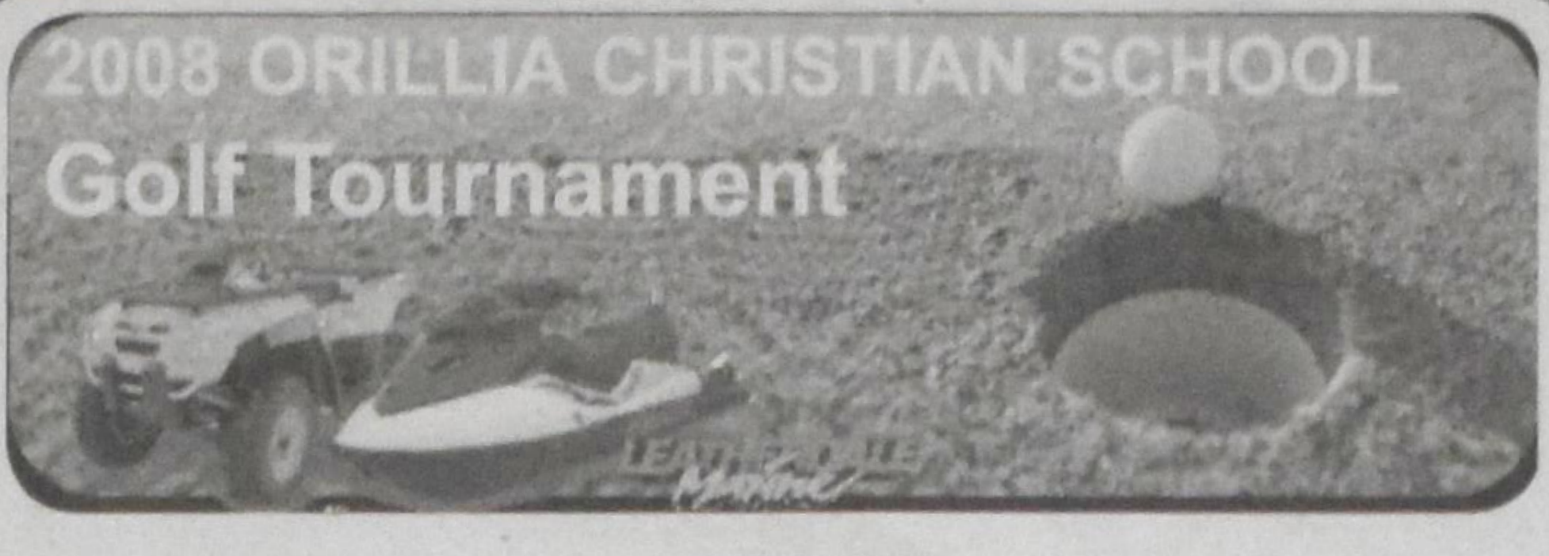
Saturday, June 7, 2008
Reunion at the School
1:00 to 5:00 pm

Email: wcs@wellandportchristianschool.ca
Website: www.wellandportchristianschool.ca
Phone:905-386-6272
Address: PO Box 123, Wellandport ON L0R 2J0

HOLLANDSE DAG

June 18 10:00 am at
First Christian Reformed Church
310 Kingscourt Ave.
Kingston.
Spreker: Rev. Carl D. Tuyl.
For info call
(613) 546-5615

Welkom



Tournament Details
* Saturday June 28th, 2008
* Shotgun start at 1:00pm.
* 4 per team, submit registrations individually or as a foursome.

Pricing
* Early Bird Registration $135.00ea. or $500.00 per team (Includes 18 holes, golf cart and dinner.
* Dinner Only $25.00ea.
* Sponsor a hole $200.00 * Corporate Sponsor a hole $350.00

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* 2008 Can-Am ATV 650 XT
* 2008 Sea Doo Wake Edition
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* Prizes for hole-in-one, closest to the pin, longest drive

Awards & Prizes:
* Prizes will be awarded to every golfer as well as to the men's and ladies closest to the pin and longest drive golfers.

If you would like to join us as an individual golfer or if you would like to enter a team please call **705-326-0532** so that a space may be reserved. Dinner guests are also invited to come out and enjoy some fellowship. Dinner is $25.00 per person and we will need to know ahead of time if you plan on joining us for dinner.

Email: **ocsgolf2008@ocswebsite.com** Website: ocswebsite.com

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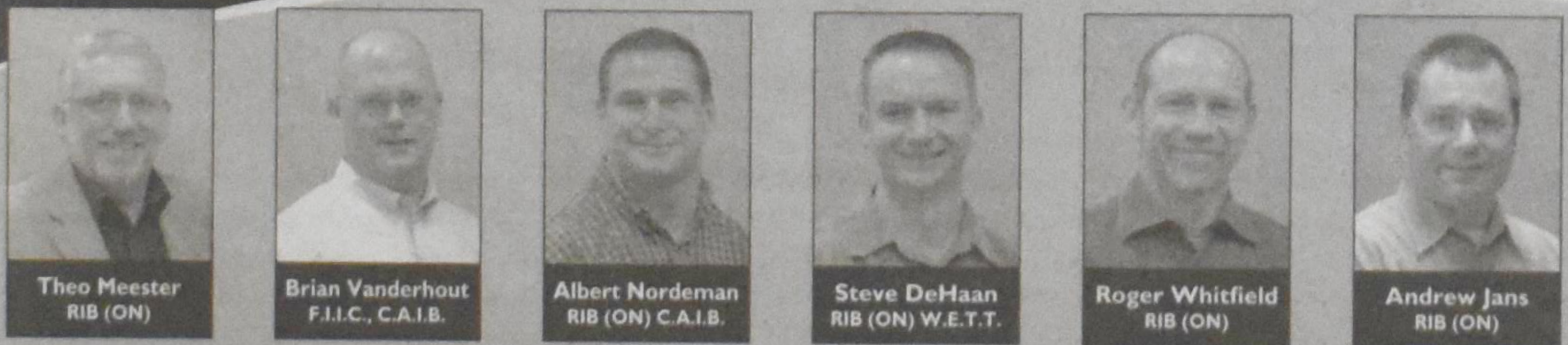

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News

As food prices shoot up, so do backyard gardens

Alexandra Marks and Patrik Jonsson

Think of it as a modern-day Victory Garden.

With gasoline prices soaring and food costs not far behind, the number of Americans planning to grow their own backyard vegetables this year is up sharply.

Gardening organizations, seed wholesalers, and local nurseries are all reporting hikes in the number of people buying vegetable seeds and starter plants.

It's a trend that started slowly several years ago, spurred by concerns about food safety, food quality, and global warming, say garden mavens. But this year's gasoline and food price spikes have had what could be called a "Miracle-Gro" effect on the backyard garden movement. This year, 39 percent of people with backyards told the Garden Writers Association they planned to grow vegetables this year. That's up five percent from last year, after remaining relatively stable with only small increases for much of the past decade.

"This is evolving into a perfect storm for vegetable gardening," says Charlie Nardozzi, senior horticulturist at the National Gardening Association in Burlington, Vt. "A lot of the economic things happening, and concerns are rising about global warming and carbon footprints, and so are worries about the quality of food, its price, and freshness – it's all come to a head."

At Running Brook Farms, a nursery in Killingworth, Conn., sales of plant seeds are already up, according to manager Louann Papoosha. Sales of starter plants have jumped as much as 20 percent this year, according to Ms. Papoosha, even though the planting season here has just begun. In fact, it's still a little bit early on the Connecticut coast for some of the more tender vegetables.

"But we are selling lots of lettuce, peas, and broccoli – the plants you can put out early," Papoosha says.

Early spring is also when many people plant trees. Last year, Running Brook sold maybe a half-dozen fruit trees, according to the staff. This year, there's been a "real heavy" run on apple, pear, and other fruit-bearing plants.

"Rather than just buying a decorative or ornamental, people are looking at fruit trees so they can have sustainable agriculture in their own backyard," says John Neely, who was busily pruning azaleas at Running Brook. "People are more inclined to get their hands dirty and have the profit of their work as opposed to just an ornamental type of planting."

Farther south, at the Oakhurst Community Gardens in urban Decatur, Ga., the gardening season is already "going gangbusters," says director Stephanie Van Parys.

The summer gardening class – usually reserved for about four or five people – filled the front room of the garden's center last month. They even had to turn people away. A class on how to raise "Chicks in the City" was also packed. And the crowd, which was usually made of the retirement set, included lots of 20- and 30-somethings.

Indeed, the rush to plant was so great this year at the two-acre urban garden that the management put in four more plots for newcomers.

To be sure, food security (especially with the 2006 spinach scares), a rising demand for locally grown organic food, and taste are big factors in the garden movement. But it was $4 bowls of edamame, or soybeans, that caused Ms. Van Parys to reconsider the kind of impact even a small vegetable garden can have on a household budget. "You get more bang for your buck out of a seed packet," she says.

That's a message that appears to be resonating nationally. At the Garden Writers Association, which surveys people annually to see how they plan to spend their gardening dollars, there was genuine surprise at the big increase in preference for vegetable gardens. For years, the top three on the list were lawns, annuals, and perennials, with vegetable gardening a distant fourth. This year, vegetable gardening jumped to No. 2.

"You've got a double whammy: The cost of food is going up disproportionately, and so is the price of gas to go get it," says Robert LaGasse, executive director of the Garden Writers Association in Manassas, Va. "With a garden, there's the cost savings, and add to it the time savings to walk out your back door and pull a couple of tomatoes from the garden for dinner tonight. It's wholesome, convenient, and you know what was done to it."

That's exactly the message that folks at the National Garden Bureau in Downer's Grove, Ill., have been promoting for years. The nonprofit educational organization, which is funded primarily by seed distributors, is hoping that this year's spike in vegetable gardening could jump-start a long-term trend.

"Once people taste their home-grown tomatoes and basil and cucumbers, they're not going to go back and buy a store-bought one," says Nona Koivula, the garden bureau's executive director. "The taste is so much better, and the nutrition is there, too."

But like other garden experts, Ms. Koivula believes there's also something more powerful and less tangible coming into play. "There are a lot of different reasons to garden this particular year, but I do think there's also this innate desire in all of us to actually put seed in the ground because that's how we all fed ourselves years ago," she says.

Back in Killingworth, Francis Barkyoumb couldn't agree more. He's been gardening since he was a little boy, with his father and his grandfather. "Just growing stuff, being outside, nature, getting your hands dirty, teaching the kids about getting their hands dirty, being one with the earth generation after generation: That's why I garden," he says.

Decatur mom Jerilynn Bedingfield agrees that there's something special about gardening.

"I just think that it's just a happy place to come," she says. "I go to the garden to find my peace of mind."

Alexandra Marks and Patrik Jonsson are staff writers of The Christian Science Monitor